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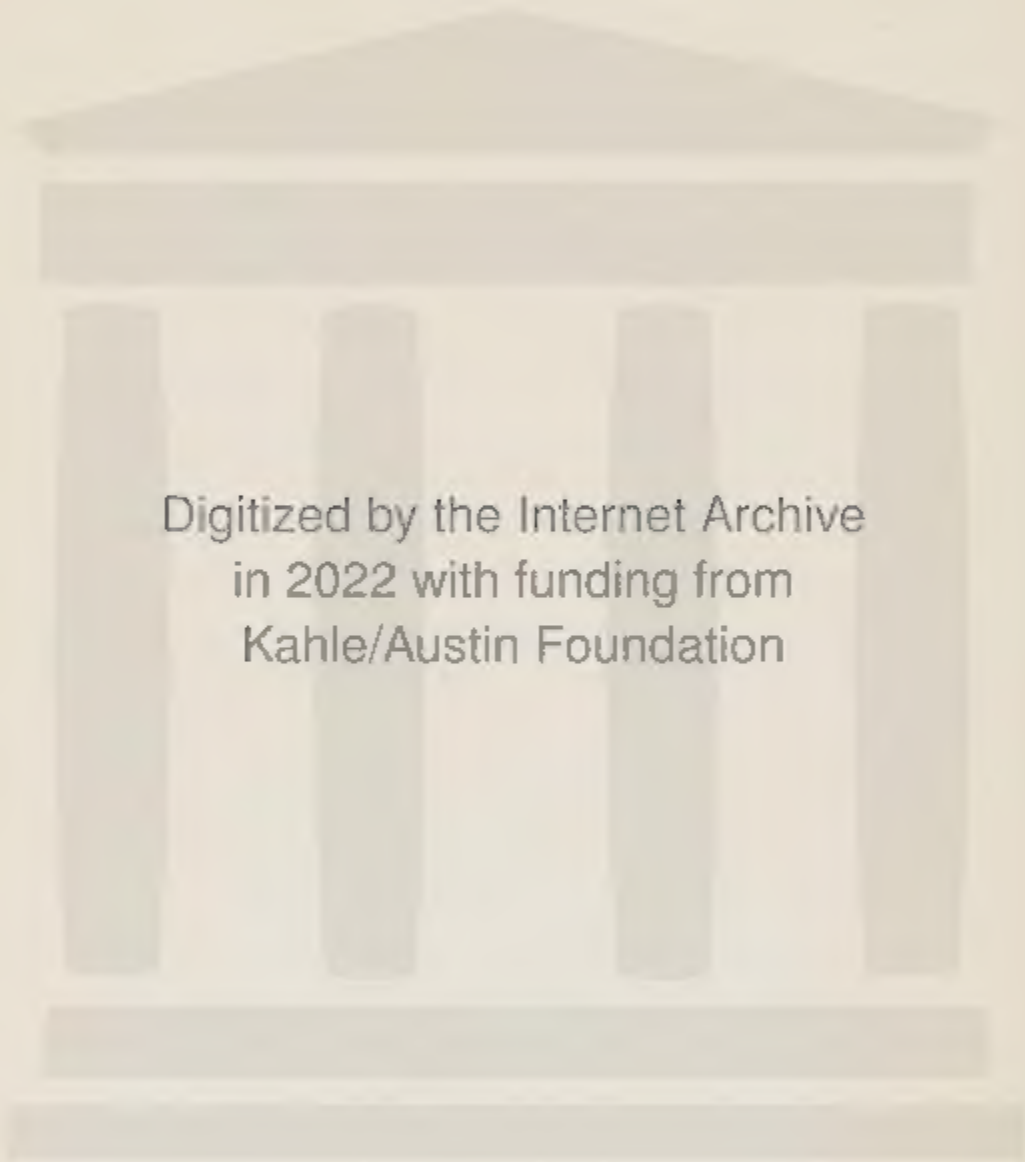
# ROGER WEST
## Takes Flight

# John Creasey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Then, he saw someone behind Roger, beyond the steel bars in the passage. And on the moment of recognising whoever was there, terror blazed up in his eyes. Roger swung round. The barrel-shaped sergeant-in-charge of cells was talking to a small man who was looking at Roger, and saying: "Yes, it's a very urgent message." He took his right hand from his pocket, but there was no message, only a gun. The man fired twice at David Bradshaw, and then once at the sergeant-in-charge who leapt at him, striking at the gun. The sergeant cried out and fell back; the gunman turned and raced along the passage; Bradshaw simply crumpled up until he was a sprawling, straggling heap on the floor. Roger sprang to the bars and shook them and shouted: "Stop that man! Stop him!"
He heard the clatter of footsteps, another shot, a thud as of a man falling. Then he heard Jameson saying in an anguished voice:
"He's dead, he's dead."

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# Roger West Takes Flight

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## John Creasey

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First published by Coronet Books 1973
Second impression 1974

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Printed and bound in Great Britain for
Coronet Books,
Hodder Paperbacks Ltd,
St. Paul's House, Warwick Lane,
London, EC4P 4AH
by Hazell Watson & Viney Ltd,
Aylesbury, Bucks

ISBN 0 340 17845 0

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MURDER, LONDON–SOUTH AFRICA

# INTRODUCTION

IF ever there were a London 'copper' it is Roger—once Inspector, now Chief Superintendent—West of the Yard. London-born-and-bred, a member of the Police Force at the earliest moment he could join, he made meteoric progress.

Many—indeed countless—readers find it hard to believe that he is not a living human-being, so lifelike and real has he become to millions throughout the world. His family is equally 'real', for his sons are modelled on their creator's own children.

For over thirty years West, then, has been considered a Londoner, with the great Metropolis his manor.

Yet since the Force was born in 1829, London policemen have always travelled the world on the trail of criminals, and some of West's most outstanding cases have taken him out of London. Three of the finest of such cases are in this Omnibus.

Perhaps the most astonishing fact about this book, its chief character, and its author, is the validity of each respective background. The author seems as familiar with the police in Sydney, New South Wales (and en route in Hong Kong) as he is with the police in London. He handles the sub-tropical background and the white man-made beauty of Miami Beach as if he had spent a lifetime there. And in MURDER, LONDON–SOUTH AFRICA there is the same vividness and reality of background, together with the author's expert handling of some very delicate situations—situations created because of standards and codes in that country not readily understood by a London 'cop'.

Not only is there great variety of scene and social background in this Omnibus; there are varieties of character, plot and theme, all different yet all handled with consummate skill. Many consider these stories of West out of the Yard among the finest police procedurals ever written.

This is not simply 'good value' West.

This is superlative value in price and story-telling.

Book One

# MURDER, LONDON-MIAMI

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# 1

## THE JEALOUS MAN

'IF he comes here again,' David Marshall said, 'I'll kill him.'

He sat strangely still; his face young for his forty years, but his expression that of an ageing, bitter, vengeful man.

It hurt Henrietta to look at him, and her hurt was made worse by the hopeless knowledge that there was no reason in what he said, no reason at all, only an anguish of emotion which she could see but could not understand.

'I mean it,' David said. 'I'll kill him.'

He watched her, expecting her to speak, waiting on her words.

The David whom she had first known—he had been so essentially 'Sir David Marshall' then, remote and almost awesome—would have used his mind to listen to her, would have been wholly reasonable and objective; but over the last few months his objectivity had nearly gone, and, in a chilling way, Henrietta suspected that she was the cause of its going.

She had done something to this man she so respected and admired. She had, without intention and at first without realising, caught and entrapped him, and no matter what she tried to do now she could not set him free.

'All you do is sit there,' he said, piqued by her lack of response. 'Why can't you say something? I've just told you that I'm going to kill your lover.'

She was stirred to protest, not yet to anger.

'You know very well he is not my lover.'

'I know you *say* he's not.'

'I'm not going over that again,' she said wearily. 'I have no lover. I've *never* had a lover.'

She was thirty-one; and she told the truth.

'I don't believe you,' he said flatly. 'You're far too attractive never to have had a lover.'

'David,' she said, ignoring the remark, 'I think you ought to go away for a holiday.'

'I'm sure you do,' he said quickly. 'So that he can come to my house, make love to my secretary——'

'David,' Henrietta interrupted, her tone icy, 'I am beginning to dislike you very much.'

It wasn't true; it was only his moods she disliked. Now she saw that she had hurt more than she had intended, and longed to take back the words.

He sat upright, squaring his shoulders.

'Yes. You do dislike me, don't you?' His voice was brisker. 'Let's have the truth—you love him, don't you?'

'Whether I love him or anybody else is my affair,' Henrietta made herself say. 'If you were in a different mood, you'd be the first to say so.'

'So we're back at that again. You work for me, your private life is no business of mine. You seem to have forgotten how close we've grown to each other—how much of a confidante you've become—how much I rely on you, *need* you.'

She made no comment.

'It's always the same,' he went on. 'One minute you seem to be really fond of me—the next you're like a block of ice. But then how could you be fond of me,' he added bitterly, 'when we both have such different backgrounds? I mustn't forget that, must I? My culture is only acquired; yours is due to breeding.'

'David,' Henrietta said desperately, 'please don't go on like this.'

He pushed his chair back and stood up.

Sometimes, when he did that, it meant the end of the discussion; that he had decided it was safer to be alone, and nurse himself back to a mood that was at least bearable. The pattern of the past year had become very set; in half-an-hour or more, sometimes less, he would come into her room and say something so warmed with humility that she would melt towards him, and they would talk on entirely different lines, he pouring his heart and his confidences out to her, she wanting desperately to help him. She would forget, again, that he would misunderstand, that he would want to take her in his arms, yearning to love and be loved.

Until he realised she did not want these things.

What he did not, could not, understand was that she wanted them with no man.

Oh, how silly it was, how crazy it was—and at times how deadly it seemed, and how hopeless.

Did he want her to go back to her room?

If not, then he would walk about the study, trying to argue himself out of the mood, drawing closer to her, until at last he would take her hands in his. He would expect her to yield, to forget the angry things he had said, and to reassure him.

He stepped to the window and stood looking out on to the smooth, velvety lawn, some roses beginning to bud, some beds of antirrhinums not yet in full bloom, and neat paths of yellow gravel. Beyond was a high wall of mellowed brick. This was one of the few genuine Queen Anne properties left in Chelsea, between the quiet river and the bustle of Kings Road. The house itself was small; David lived upstairs and worked downstairs, and before these moods had seized him they had usually lunched together in the kitchen, after his daily help had gone.

'You don't believe me, do you?' he asked abruptly.

'What don't I believe?'

'That if Ward comes here again, I'll kill him.'

'Of course I don't believe it.'

Without looking round, yet with a change in tone which told her what change had come in his expression, he said:

'Keep him away. Because I mean it.'

In that moment there was no doubt at all; he meant exactly what he said. The realisation made Henrietta feel a sudden fear, but also anger. What right had David to say such things to her? She spent so many hours here, dedicated to working for him. She liked the work, at times she loved it, but she could not give him every hour of every day. Oh, how absurd it was! If Gerry called for her and she wasn't ready, then she would ask him in. Not to be able to do so would be intolerable. But if she said this now, what would David do? In his present mood, she could not be sure.

But already her anger was fading; already she was anxious only to help him. Time and time again she told herself that she must not let him get away with such accusations, that he would take her compassion—and it *was* compassion—for weakness. She should be stronger, but such was not her kind of strength.

He was watching her now, eyes burning.

'Do you understand?' he asked harshly.

'David,' she said quietly, 'what's upset you so much today?'

'Do you understand?' he asked again.

She hesitated.

. . .

*She did not know that, when he was in such a mood as this, she nearly drove him mad. Her stillness, the unwinking gaze of her beautiful blue eyes, her almost*

*bird-like alertness—all of these things affected him; but she did not know.*

* * *

'Yes,' she said. 'I understand perfectly well.'

He drew nearer, until he stood only a few feet away from her, quite motionless. She did not like the way he stared; he *was* different from his usual self, even at his most difficult. He seemed almost a stranger. Yet she had worked for him for rather more than six years and known him—or believed she had known him—for three. In those early aloof days, when she had no reason to suspect that he was anything but happy, loving his wife, he had been a stranger. Although she had respected and at times even liked him, she had never felt that she had known the real man. But for the past three years she had come to believe she was familiar with all his moods, and this different one was almost sinister.

She was deeply troubled.

Usually, it was he who would come towards her. In moments when he seemed to be frozen, incapable of moving or relaxing, he would suddenly wilt, despair would show in his eyes, and he would come to her for comfort and for solace, holding her tightly, fiercely, as if he dared not let her go. And she would coax him into talking, into telling her what had worried him.

Only once before had she seen him look as he looked now; that had been the first time, the very first time, he had talked. Then, he had sat behind his big, red-topped desk, she sitting opposite him.

'What is worrying you?' she had ventured to ask at last.

'You don't know, do you?' he had answered.

'No,' she had said.

'I've hidden it from you completely, then?'

'Hidden *what* from me?'

'Henrietta,' he had said, 'my wife is mad.'

It had been a very great shock to her. There had always been something a little different about Yolande, of course, times when she was over-excited, times when she stayed in her room for days on end, seeing no one; but Henrietta had not thought about it deeply, her interest then had been so much more in the work and the man rather than in his private life. She had only an acquaintance with Yolande—his blonde, unbelievably selfish wife. It had never occurred to her that she and Yolande could ever have anything in common, and David's home life was something quite remote from her, even though she worked in his home.

His expression at the time he had told her had been exactly as it was now, and she could remember his words vividly.

'Henrietta—my wife is mad.'

. . .

It was true; literally true, she had learned.

Psychiatrists had tried to help Yolande, but every kind of treatment had failed; and now she was in a private nursing home, a luxury place where she was well cared for, and from whence—if David told the truth and Henrietta had never known him lie—she did not wish to come.

'She's happier there,' he said, occasionally.

Gradually, Henrietta had come to learn how lonely he had been for so many years, hiding the fact of his wife's insanity from the world. Gradually, too, certain facts had emerged: that it was because of this that there had been no children; that Yolande had been aware of the mad streak in her, but that he, David, had not known of it until after their marriage.

'And when I did know of it,' he said, 'I came to hate her.'

'David, don't say that. *Please* don't say that.'

'But you and I have a pact,' he had said through his pain. 'We tell the truth to each other. Don't you remember? Am I to lie to you because you don't like a certain aspect of the truth?'

And she had admitted: 'No, of course not.' And added: 'I just wish it weren't true.' Then after a pause, searching her heart and mind to find something to say which would give him courage, she had added again: 'But I can understand it.'

He had laughed, as if genuinely amused.

'You—understand hate? You couldn't hate anyone if you tried all your life.'

'But intellectually I can understand it,' she insisted.

'Ah, yes. Understand but not feel it. I hope to God you never know what hatred feels like, Henrietta.'

Then he had started to talk of the little daily hurts of his years with Yolande, of the effort of hiding the truth about her, of trying to help her, of suffering so much in silence.

Now, he looked exactly as he had looked that day three years ago, when he had told her how he had learned to hate.

* * *

At that moment, at half-past six in the evening of a pleasant day in June, a man turned into Bell Street, Chelsea, not half-a-mile away from Sir David Marshall's home. His was a smaller but self-contained house in a street which was much more suburban than those around it. He had lived there for nearly twenty years.

His wife was weeding the narrow flower-bed round the small lawn as he drove into the garage. She stood up

and went towards him, both deriving obvious pleasure from the familiar meeting.

The man was Superintendent Roger West of the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard.

# 2

## THE ANGRY WOMAN

HENRIETTA studied David's features intently and felt what she had come to feel more often than ever in her life: tenderness. She wanted to comfort him, to ease the tension he was feeling, but did not know how best to do it. Recollection of that first moment of confidence, when he had told her that his wife was mad, had clouded her mind; but now it was clear again.

The certain thing was that she could not accept this situation, could not allow him to dictate such terms to her. Once she did so, he would dominate her absolutely, and she knew that he had great strength of will. He stood unmoving, unyielding, in front of her, until again she asked:

'David, what *has* upset you? Please tell me.'

'You've upset me,' he answered flatly.

'I certainly didn't mean to.'

'I couldn't have made it plainer that I don't want that man in my house.'

'You know—you're absurd,' Henrietta said with a sudden spurt of anger. She saw the set of his jaw, but went on: 'There isn't the slightest need for you to make all this fuss! I can't keep him, or anyone else, on the doorstep when they call for me.'

'He doesn't have to call for you,' David said.

There was going to be no reasoning with him; the moment had come to recognise that. It hurt, because it was so unfair and unreasonable; but David was David and it was useless to try to force him out of this sort of mood. It passed through her mind that one day she

would have to get another job—but the thought passed; it was practically unthinkable that, while he needed her, she would ever leave him.

'Can't we talk about this again tomorrow?' she asked. 'You really ought to sign those letters.'

'They can wait,' he said.

'But you said——'

'They can wait,' he repeated irritably.

'Don't let's argue any more,' she pleaded, 'I'm so tired.'

'You wouldn't be tired if *he* were coming,' David flashed.

Quite suddenly, reason deserted her and anger surged out of control. Night after night she worked late, Saturdays and Sundays she would work if need be, reading and researching until she felt that her head would split with concentration. Last night was the first for over a week that she had left by half-past six—and even then she had kept Gerry waiting for nearly an hour, kicking his heels and getting more and more annoyed.

'Trying to cope with you in this mood would make anyone tired,' she said sharply. 'I'll go and get the letters.'

She turned on her heel and stalked towards the door which led to her room, an annexe of David's study. She reached the door and pulled it open, hearing no sound—but suddenly David's hands fell on to her shoulders and he spun her round.

'Henrietta—don't ever run out on me.'

She felt the pressure of his fingers very tight on her shoulders—and his thumbs and forefingers were very near her neck. His eyes had a glitter which she had never seen in them before. She did not move, but spoke with restrained tension.

'David, let me go.'

The pressure at her neck increased. She believed that

he meant it to increase, that he was trying to frighten her; and her anger flared up again.

'Let me go, David!'

'I'll let you go when I have your promise never to allow Gerald Ward in my house again.'

She waited for perhaps ten seconds. Then she pulled herself free and pushed him away, snatched at the door and opened it, and ran through, slamming it behind her. Quite suddenly tears stung her eyes and she went almost blindly to her desk and dropped into her chair.

The door did not open; and she prayed that it would not, at least until she was more in control of herself, when she would be able to talk more calmly.

This small, book-lined room was in itself a place of calm. She had come to regard it as her own. One wall was filled from floor to ceiling with David's reference books; Henrietta, who so loved books and words, had come to regard these as her own, too. Her desk, the same style as his, was smaller, and by its side was a typewriter table, with a stream-lined machine on it.

His letters, placed by the typewriter and ready for signing, caught her eye. Unless she went to the main post office she would miss tonight's post.

She sat staring at them, her vision blurred through tears—she had not realised that she had cried. She felt physically exhausted. David's words echoed and re-echoed through her mind, but one thing slowly emerged as being most immediately important: the letters.

She ought to take them into him.

Yet if she waited, and if he behaved as he normally did, he would soon open the door and stride towards her, put out his hands for her to take, and draw her from her chair. He would hold her tightly, and for a moment she would yield. Then, slowly he would let her go and she would drop back into her chair, with an odd feeling of relief. This would be partly because his tension would

have eased, partly because she never really liked that moment of physical closeness.

She sat for what seemed a very long time.

He wasn't coming, of course; this mood *was* different, more intractable. She was over her own anger now, and wondered what *had* happened to upset him so much. The most likely thing was that he had had news of Yolande. She, Henrietta, ought to go and talk to him—or at least give him the chance to talk, and the letters were ample excuse. She put her hand on them—a long hand with large but well-shaped nails, a gold signet ring on the little finger of her right hand, a family ring.

There was still no sign from next door.

She stood up—and the buzzer at the telephone on her desk rang; he was calling her, but at the same time demonstrating his no-nonsense-I'm-the-boss mood. She gave a little smile: it was really so absurd. Why did men so often behave like small boys, standing on their dignity when really they should laugh? She picked up the letters and went straight in to him.

He was sitting at his desk.

'I'll sign those letters,' he said. 'They can still catch the post at the main post office. Can you go home that way?'

'Yes, of course.'

She sat opposite him; he signed, she filled and sealed the envelopes in a curious atmosphere of restraint.

'Are you in a hurry tonight?' he asked, when at last they were finished.

She was over an hour late, her hair-washing, dress-pressing, newspaper-reading plans for the evening were already in jeopardy.

He looked ill, she thought.

'No hurry at all,' she said.

He nodded and sat looking at her; there *must* be something seriously wrong.

'David—please tell me what the matter is.'

'If I told you, you wouldn't believe me.'

'You could try,' she suggested.

'I'll try,' he said. 'I love you.'

She had only half-expected that, and she did not quite understand the effect it had on her: a curious, sharp *ping*! of pain in her breast, followed by a feeling almost of alarm.

'Do you?' she asked, quietly. 'You show it in a strange way.'

'It's the truth,' he said. 'I could kill any man who put his hands on you.'

He had fine, clear grey eyes; and now they seemed to burn. The lines round them and the shadows gave them an added brilliance, and she could not help the flash of thought which came into her mind: that that brilliance could be the glint of madness.

'I wish you wouldn't talk like that.'

'But it's the truth,' he insisted.

'You may feel like it now——'

'*May!*' he exploded. 'I do feel like it, now and every waking minute of the day. Why do you pretend you don't know? Why do you behave as if you haven't an ounce of feeling in you? My God, you can freeze the very blood in me, just by the expression in your eyes.'

Heavily, wearily, she said: 'I don't intend to.'

'No, I'll grant you that,' he said bitterly. 'It's the natural you, when you're with me. I'll bet *he* sees a different you.'

If Gerry Ward even attempted to be as familiar with her in the way that David had come to accept as his right, she would never see him again.

'I think I ought to go home,' she said.

'You said you were in no hurry.'

'I'm not in a hurry,' she confirmed. 'I just don't want to talk like this.'

He pushed his chair back, but did not get up, stared out of the window and then closed his eyes, as if he felt a heavy, wounding pain. She was never sure whether it was affectation when he did that, or whether he was simply trying to win her sympathy. She *felt* sympathy, whatever his intention, and studied his profile.

He was the most handsome man she knew.

He had the best brain of any man she knew, also—and, surprisingly, either he did not realise its range and power, or else was genuinely touched with humility.

He spoke without opening his eyes.

'He's no good, you know.'

She didn't answer.

'He's not worth an hour of your time.'

She still didn't answer.

'I can't understand what you see in him,' he insisted, and now he opened his eyes and turned his chair to look at her. He closed his eyes again, momentarily, as if to shut out a vision. Of her? How was it that at certain times they could be so close, while at others they were such poles apart? wondered Henrietta.

'David,' she said. 'I'm not going to talk about Gerald. I've already told you that you've no reason to be jealous of him or of anyone.' He had neither right nor reason, but she did not speak of 'right'. 'There's no one I like and respect and admire more than you,' she added. 'I'm devoted to you. You *must* know that.'

'Yes,' he said. 'It happens not to be enough.'

She took refuge in silence, the only refuge.

'Come and live here with me, Henrietta,' he said at last. 'There's no reason why you shouldn't. You've no family ties, you've a poky little flat, you spend an hour and a half a day travelling—and you could have your own suite of rooms here, all the comfort I could give you—everything. Yolande won't ever come back, no one would blame either of us. And you'd be happier than

you've ever been in your life. Happier and more secure and free from all the silly little chores which take up your time. Why won't you? What makes you so stubborn?'

It was not the first time he had suggested this, but he had never been so dispassionate, never subdued his emotion as he was doing now. She did not quite know how to answer, even whether to answer; she wished now that she hadn't stayed.

'*I* know why you won't,' he added harshly. 'Your heads filled with romantic notions of young love, white weddings, bridesmaids——'

The telephone bell cut across his words.

He caught his breath, tightened his lips, then motioned to her.

'Say I'm out. I don't want to talk to anybody.'

Relieved at the break in the tension, thinking that it might well enable her to change the mood of the talk, Henrietta picked up the receiver.

'Sir David Marshall's home.'

'Are you going to stay there all night?' demanded Gerry Ward in a voice so loud and clear it echoed about the room.

. . .

In the kitchen of his home, Roger West put his arm lightly round his wife's shoulders as she stood at the oven.

'How would you like a holiday this year?' he asked. 'Starting next week?'

Janet West twisted round to see whether he was serious. She looked flushed and untidy and suddenly excited.

'*Next* week? You mean it?'

'Yes, unless something unexpected crops up,' said Roger. 'I thought we'd——'

The telephone bell interrupted him.

'I'll bet that's something unexpected,' Janet said almost bitterly. 'Sometimes I wonder whether we'll ever get away on holiday together again.'

# 3

## THE THIRD IN THE TRIO

IN David Marshall's lovely room there was silence.

The echoes of Gerry's voice over the telephone still sounded. Henrietta stood with the pale grey instrument in her hand, startled. David sat with his jaw set, staring out of the window.

'Are you *there*?' demanded Gerry Ward.

'I'm working late tonight,' Henrietta said, surprised by her own calmness. 'I don't know what time I'll be free.'

'But, Henrietta! I may have to be away for——'

She put the receiver down, briskly, cutting off his voice. Now, the silence seemed absolute.

'You once told me,' said David in a brittle voice, 'that you asked your friends not to telephone you while you were here.'

'I once told you,' said Henrietta, in an exasperated voice, 'that I asked my friends not to telephone me when I should be working.' She glanced at a star-shaped clock, centred on the mantelpiece; it was nearly seven o'clock.

'You knew he was waiting for you, didn't you?'

Henrietta felt, once again, that this was a moment of crisis. If she told him what was in fact the truth, that she had not known Gerry was waiting, this might appear to David to be a concession to his right to interfere with her life outside this house. And above everything she prized her independence, rejecting the right of any human being to direct her affairs.

She had suffered much during the only period of her life when she *had* given a man that right; and she knew

that remembrance of this suffering influenced many of her attitudes, most of all her attitude towards any thought of marriage.

'It doesn't really matter whether I did or I didn't,' she said at last. 'I preferred to stay here and talk to you.'

'You mean I made it impossible for you not to stay.'

Henrietta bit her lip and turned her head away, a fresh flare of anger almost making her jump up again, and leave. But if she did, then there would be an awkward situation to face in the morning, and it could mean a long, uneasy, unhappy day. When she looked back his face seemed to have changed, she saw the pain in his eyes, no less because it was self-induced. Then she wondered yet again what *had* caused his present mood. There must be something he had not yet told her, and if she could only make him talk this might be of great help to him as well as to her.

'David,' she said gently, 'I do wish you'd tell me what's upset you.'

'I keep telling you what's upset me,' he said savagely. '*You* have upset me. I am sick and tired of spending evening after evening here alone while you're off with your newest admirer. Get *that* into your head. It's *you* who's upset me. When are you going to realise that though I can't offer you the legal ceremony of marriage, I *can* offer you everything else, which is a hundred times more than you'd get from these moronic young fools you spend your evenings with. My God, you wouldn't last six months with any one of them—they'd drive you mad with their addle-pated inanities. Stop fooling yourself—they're too young for you, they've nothing to offer you but——'

Something cracked in her.

She was already tired, she had been working too hard for too long, and the emotional stresses of the day had taken their toll. Now, her self-control cracked and she

sprang up from her chair and stood by the desk, quivering with rage.

. . .

She would never know how beautiful anger made her, never know what the fire did to her blue eyes, or the quivering tension did to her lips, or the poise did to her figure. In that moment she felt she hated him; all that she wanted to do was *hurt*.

. . .

David Marshall sat, startled out of his bitter, savage mood, seeing Henrietta as he had never seen her before, so filled with anger that she lost the cool, imperturbable calm which so often maddened and at other times hurt him in ways he did not understand. Everything else faded from his mind—his jealousy of Gerald Ward, his own anger, the sense of near-despair that he had felt all day. He placed his hands on the arm of his chair and began to get up, searching in his mind for something to say to console her, but could not find it.

'No wonder Yolande went mad.' Henrietta's voice shook. 'And you're mad yourself or you wouldn't behave like this. Well, you needn't worry about Gerald coming here again. He certainly won't, because *I* won't.'

David stared at her, as if stunned by her words. There was no awareness of time in the seconds or minutes which followed. And there was no whisper of sound, until the drone of a car engine came into the street. This seemed to break the tension which had seized Henrietta, and she turned and walked swiftly out of David's room and into her own.

She did not know what David did.

She knew that this was a climax, that their relationship

would never be the same again. She had often envisaged such a moment, when she would have to face the fact that the emotional situation would blow up in her face and she would have to leave him, and this house, and this work which had become part of her life.

She began to collect her personal things. There were not many, practically everything but a dictionary, some pens and oddments were David's—hers by usage over the years but nevertheless, David's. She felt a strange and unfamiliar stinging pain at the back of her eyes. Then she squared her shoulders, consciously, and looked about her, like a bird, head turning in all directions. The books, so beloved, the desk, the pictures, all were there, each with its own particular significance for her.

Tight-lipped, tight-jawed, she went out of her room and into the passage. Her car was in the street, she could go to it through the front door, and pass David's window, or through the back door and stand no risk of being seen. She did not hesitate, but turned right, towards the back door. Her footsteps sounded clearly on the highly polished wooden boards.

Will he try to stop me? she wondered, but the thought did not make her pause. Reaching the door she went through, closing it carefully behind her, and stepped into the paved yard, with a closed wooden gate which opened on to the road—Glebe Crescent, S.W.3.

He wasn't coming.

He was letting her go.

She opened the gate, caught a nail on the latch, and winced; the wince turned into a sob.

Of course he was letting her go.

This was the end.

The car, a blue mini-Morris, was parked opposite the gate. Half-a-dozen other cars were parked close by, but there were plenty of gaps, Glebe Crescent was too far from the shops and too thinly populated ever to be

crowded. She put down her bag and fumbled for her key. *Where the devil was it?* She couldn't, she *couldn't* have left it in her desk—if so, nothing would make her go back for it.

Suddenly she saw the blue tag to which it was fastened. Thank God! She took it out very carefully; whatever happened she mustn't drop it, she mustn't lose a second.

She pushed the key into the lock, and as she did so, saw a movement out of the corner of her eye, at the main gate of David's house. She felt a curious sensation: her heart seemed to turn over. It wasn't David, of course, it was someone from the house next door; the gates were very close together.

She opened the car door.

*It was David.*

She banged her knee on the door handle.

*He was coming towards her.*

She hadn't taken the key out of the door, she had to half-close the door to get at it.

*He was almost at her side.*

She pulled out the key and started to get in.

*He was speaking to her.*

. . .

'Don't go,' David said in a low-pitched voice. 'Please don't go.'

She didn't look at him and didn't speak.

'Henrietta,' he went on, pleadingly, 'come and talk to me. Please don't go.'

She scrambled into the driving seat and pulled the door to behind her. She was trembling and it crossed her mind that she was in no condition to drive, all strength seemed to have been drained out of her.

He pulled the door open.

'Henrietta,' he begged, 'I'm sorry. I'm terribly sorry. Please don't go away like this.'

His head and shoulders were inside the car and she could not close the door on him. He did not attempt to get in, just stood there, one hand outstretched but not moving.

If she weakened now, she realised, she would be forever at his mercy. If he could plead and win her after this, he could win whatever happened, and she must not give way. It would be madness—for him, for her. After what they had said they would never be the same again, it was useless even to try to patch this quarrel up.

She turned the key in the ignition.

'Please don't stay there,' she managed to say. 'It won't make any difference.'

The engine roared, more loudly than she intended, as she jabbed her foot on the accelerator pedal and let in the clutch.

'*David, let go!*' she said breathlessly. 'I'm not coming back. Let me close the door.'

As she spoke, he stretched out his hand and pulled the key out of the ignition. The engine died away. She snatched at the key but he closed his fingers over it.

'David!' she called desperately, 'give me my key!'

He ignored her, and walked back towards the house.

* * *

Roger West put down the receiver and went back to the kitchen, pulling a long face. He was a big, powerful man whose fair hair hid the grey streaks that his forty-odd years had brought. Janet, tall and attractive and looking younger than her years, noted his expression.

'Don't say you've got to go out again before dinner,' she said vexedly.

He pulled a chair from the table.

'I haven't got to go out at all,' he said. 'That was Bill Sloan, to tell me we've caught a fellow we've been after for several weeks. That was the case which might have kept me. When *is* dinner? Even when I do get home I don't get fed.'

She aimed a blow at him with an empty plate, but her eyes glowed with relief and pleasure.

# 4

## THE CLASH

HENRIETTA sat at the wheel of the useless car, wondering what to do next. Staring straight ahead she saw David reach the main gate of the house and go inside. He did not look round.

'I'll *walk* rather than go after him!' she burst out, and touched the door handle, actually pushed the door open an inch; as she did so a child passed on a bicycle, and startled her. She pulled the door to quickly, and held it closed. She could just see the front door of Number 5, open; he expected her to go back, of course, was sure that she would.

If she didn't, if she walked——

She clenched her fist and banged the seat beside her.

She would still have to come back to get the car. She didn't need it again tonight, but she would certainly need it tomorrow . . . .

She caught her breath, realising that there would be no need to drive here in the morning. Time and time and time again she had told herself that she must stop the situation between them from getting worse; now she had stopped it, there must be no going back.

So it was essential for her to get the key.

She got out of the car and closed the door quietly. The child cyclist was out of sight, but an elderly man was on the other side of the street: he touched his hat to her. She gave a mechanical smile and walked towards Number 5 as enraptured by its clean, Queen Anne lines and the tall windows, the warm red brickwork, and the fine,

white-painted door, as she had been when she first saw them.

She went in, soft-footed, then whispered to herself: 'It's no use pretending I'm not here.' She walked briskly towards David's study, the door of which stood open. Opposite were the stairs, shallow and elegant, like the whole house.

David was sitting at his desk, looking at her. The key was on the corner, where she always sat and where she often put it when he called her in from the hall.

'Come in, Henrietta,' he said in a steady voice.

Set-faced, she went towards the key.

'Sit down,' he said.

'No, I won't sit down,' said Henrietta. She nearly added: 'ever again' but this sounded cheap—she hated even thinking of saying it. She was close to the key now, and wondered if he would snatch it up if she stretched out for it. He was perhaps a little less tense than he had been before, certainly that almost mask-like expression had gone.

She picked the key up.

'Goodbye,' she said.

'Henrietta, you're being silly.'

'I've been silly far too long,' she said. 'Goodbye.'

She began to turn; and she was not truly sure whether or not she wanted him to try to stop her. Pride, in a way, made her hope that he would, but anger still simmered close to the surface, and she knew that if he so much as touched her again she would lose her self-control. She hated doing that, for she had always prized her ability to keep her head no matter what the circumstances.

He did not move, and she stepped quickly towards the door.

'Henrietta!'

She ignored him.

'Henrietta,' he called in a sharper voice, 'come back

and talk to me. There isn't any need to make a fuss like this.'

She reached the door and trod on a slip mat—and two things happened at the same time. His chair scraped, she quickened her pace and the mat seemed to slide from under her. She tripped, falling backwards, and grabbed at the door frame to save herself—but this lost precious seconds, and before she could start moving again David had caught up with her. Instead of touching her, he passed and stood with his back to the door, to bar her passage.

'Get out of my way!' she ordered, breathlessly.

'Henrietta,' David said, 'I am not going to let you go until we've talked. I'm sorry I behaved so badly—I really am. I'll try to control myself in future, but——'

'You won't need to,' she said, decisively. 'I won't be here.'

She stepped forward, and for a moment thought he was going to let her pass. Then at the last moment he shot his arm out, and held her. She felt a momentary impulse to struggle but realised this would be useless, so she stood absolutely still.

'Let me go, please.'

'Come and talk this over,' he insisted.

'We've talked too many things over,' she said. 'It gets us nowhere.'

'You can't walk out like this.'

'I can and I will,' insisted Henrietta, 'and if you try to hold me by force it will only make me more anxious to get away.'

She studied his face as she spoke, seeing a gradual change coming over it, the expression hardening, the light of pleading dying from his eyes. He would let her go, of course; it was what she wanted and knew was inevitable, yet at the same time what she hated and also what seemed impossible.

'For the last time,' he said, 'please come and talk sensibly.'

'For the last time,' she retorted, 'please let me go.'

He took his arm away, slowly. They stood still for a moment, as if each felt the almost mesmeric effect of the other's gaze. Then she stepped past him. She saw that it was raining quite heavily, but did not give it a second thought. This period in her life was over and there would be no going back.

She heard a faint rustle of movement behind her, and thought, he's going into the study. He's going.

Then his hands grasped her, fingers tight and painful on the top of her shoulders, and he spun her round. She was quite helpless, and staggered against him. He released her for a moment, then pulled her towards him so violently that the breath was almost squeezed out of her body. Holding the back of her head, he forced her face upwards and pressed his lips against hers.

She hated being kissed.

For long, long years, she had hated being kissed, had refused to allow a man to kiss her, other than touch her cheeks with his lips. Now, she felt the bruising pressure of David's lips on hers.

She felt as if she would faint.

She sensed when he let her go, that she was falling.

He held her up, and there was a note in his voice which almost pierced the mists of semi-consciousness.

'*Are you all right?*'

She couldn't speak. Her mouth seemed to burn. Her whole body was limp.

'*Are you all right?*' he cried.

Suddenly, he lifted her in both arms and carried her; she felt him putting her down on the couch where, sometimes, they would sit and talk, he pouring out the distress which he had felt for so many years, she listening, prompting, allowing his hand to rest on her shoulder

with the gentle near-intimacy which was all he seemed to need in such times as those.

He pushed a cushion under her head and she was comfortable. She was not yet able to think clearly, and allowed thoughts to drift. She heard the chink of glass and realised he was pouring her a drink; yes, she could do with a drink, it would help her.

She mustn't stay; if she was sure of anything, it was that she mustn't stay.

She sensed that he was close to her again, and opened her eyes. He was bending down beside her, glass in hand, looking at her with a strained intensity. How clear his eyes were and how lined his face, especially at the corners of his mouth and eyes.

'Let me help you sit up,' he said.

'I'm—I'm all right.'

'No, let me help you.' He did so, gently, putting the cushion further down into the small of her back. Then he held the glass to her lips. 'Not poison,' he said drily. 'Just brandy.'

It did her good.

For the first time, she thought: 'What a silly thing to do,' and with the thought came another: 'What a *weak* thing to do.' To think that she should allow herself to be so affected because he had kissed her!

'Have another sip,' he urged.

She saw him glance up, and wondered why, then heard footsteps outside the front door, sharp and clear on the gravel drive; then they were inside the hall, muffled by carpet. She was facing the doorway, and saw a man appear in it—saw *Gerald*.

Everything that followed happened at lightning speed. She was aware of one thing upon another and yet they seemed to merge together and become blurred.

First she saw Gerry, pausing for a split-second, filling the doorway. He was a big man, heavier, stronger,

younger than David. Then she saw David, saw his expression, the rage on his face. She saw his hands, raised and clenched, and she saw him rush across the room.

Gerry looked up, startled; he thrust his arm up but failed to fend the blow off completely, and the sound of David's fist on Gerry's jaw sounded loud and clear.

'Stop it!' gasped Henrietta.

It was like trying to speak in a nightmare.

*'Stop it!'* she screamed, yet she knew she made no sound.

Gerry staggered to one side—then, regaining his balance, he swung round and struck David first with his right fist, then with his left.

David fell back, knocked against a chair, tried to save himself. But, half-crouching, Gerry hit him again and sent him sprawling into the fireplace.

Henrietta was sobbing to herself now, hating everything she saw, and yet she was watching with awful intensity and could not bring herself to look away.

Gerry bent down and gripped David's coat and tugged at him. There was a clatter of firearms, the gasping of the two men—and blood at the corner of David's mouth.

She tried to get off the couch; but could not move.

Gerry had hauled David to his feet, and let him go—and drew back his arm to strike again. As he did so, David lunged forward, aiming another blow at Gerry's jaw. Gerry hurtled backwards, staggered, then lost his balance and fell heavily across the metal fender.

Suddenly, Henrietta could move.

As Gerry stumbled to his feet she leapt off the couch and sprang towards them. 'For heaven's sake,' she cried, 'behave like civilised people.' But neither man seemed to notice her; they stood glaring at each other; and in each, at that moment, there was a terrible hate.

But there was a gap between them, and Henrietta stepped into it, David on her right, Gerry on her left.

She had no idea what she would do if they ignored her and began to fight again.

# 5

## 'CIVILISED' MEN

THERE were three sounds: the furious, sickening thumping of Henrietta's heart, Gerry's heavy, measured breathing, and David's quick, shallow gasps for breath.

A fourth sound became audible: the ticking of the clock.

At last, Henrietta's heartbeats quietened; at last she felt that she dared step back. As she did so, David put a hand gingerly to his chin. There was a swelling on the side of his jaw and another on his left temple.

He moistened his lips.

'Civilised people,' he said drily, glancing at Gerry.

Henrietta's heart began to thump again, but Gerry did not react except to move his left arm cautiously upwards; it looked as if it hurt him to do so. David put his clean hand towards his pocket and took out a handkerchief, but before he could raise it to his lips, Henrietta said quietly:

'You ought to bathe that first.'

His hand stopped moving.

'Yes, I suppose I ought,' he agreed. 'I'll go and do something about it.' He stepped unsteadily towards the door, and from it added: 'Give Mr. Ward a drink.'

'*Very* civilised of you,' Gerry said, harshly.

Henrietta shot him a sharp, reproving glance, and followed David through the doorway, across the hall, and into the tiny cloakroom at the back of the stairs. There was a first-aid box standing on a narrow window ledge and she opened it, then pulled some sections of soft paper towelling from a roll on a wall fixture.

David was leaning against the wall. He looked very tired, very old, and she went to him, quickly, and took his arm.

'You'll feel better when you've bathed your face,' she said. 'Let me help you with your coat.'

Very gently, she eased the jacket off and hung it on a peg. He began to fumble at a cuff-link and she unfastened it, then that on the other sleeve. He rolled his sleeves up himself, each movement an effort.

'I'm all right,' he said. 'Go and look after Ward. I don't want him left alone in my study.'

'Oh, David, please——'

'I don't want him alone in my study,' David rasped.

Henrietta stared at him, uncertainly, as he turned his back on her and lowered his head towards the basin. He seemed more himself, but she could not rid herself of the shock of seeing him looking so suddenly grey and old.

He was deliberately ignoring her; so she went out.

Before she turned towards the study, she stood quite still in the middle of the hall and weakness overcame her again; for a few seconds, everything swam round her. Moving, almost blindly, to a chair, she lowered herself into it.

She had never seen men fight before.

She had never seen savagery and hate in a man before.

And she realised, suddenly, that these men must have been fighting over her.

. . .

'I enjoyed that,' said Roger West, with a heavy tone of surprise.

'Haven't you enjoyed my cooking before?' demanded Janet.

'Oh, occasionally,' he said, and put his hand over hers. 'How are the boys?'

'I hardly see them these days,' Janet said, a little woefully. 'They scramble down for breakfast and rush off without saying goodbye, and only come in if they're hungry.'

'Are they all right?' asked Roger, seriously.

Janet looked at him thoughtfully, and pushed her chair back.

'You don't see much of them at all these days, do you?' she said.

'I've been busy three week-ends in a row,' he reminded her. '*Are* they all right, Jan?'

'Yes,' she answered briskly. 'As far as they can be. Richard can think of nothing but his hopes of getting into television. Scoop still *works* at his painting but doesn't say much about it. I think he's less sure than he was that it's the right life for him.'

'He'll find out,' Roger remarked.

'But he's wasting an awful lot of time when he could be training for something else,' Janet said.

Roger watched as she got up and began to clear the plates away. Coffee was percolating on the gas stove, a big, untouched trifle stood on the dresser, plates and spoons by it.

'You're worried about him, are you?' he asked.

Janet turned to look at him, and he could see that she was troubled; just as he could see that she was a very attractive woman who did not seem her age. She moved easily and usually smiled freely, but she was frowning now.

'I think I will be if he doesn't decide what to do soon,' she said. 'You really ought to discuss it with him, dear.' She picked up a spoon and plunged it into the trifle. 'You will be home this week-end, won't you?'

'Yes,' Roger promised. 'And I'll talk to Scoop.'

They were quiet as she put the trifle in front of him, and he picked up a jug of cream; quiet, as she sat down and they began to eat. The problem of his older child was always sobering, and Roger—whenever he thought about it—felt half-guilty because he allowed Martin-called-Scoop to drift, more than half-convinced that it was best to keep a very light rein on a boy in his late teens.

He had nearly finished the trifle when the telephone bell rang. He pushed his chair back, flashed Janet an apologetic glance, stepped into the hall, and lifted the receiver.

'West.' He listened, then said sharply: '*Who?*'

Janet, watching him through the open doorway, knew then that this was no ordinary call. 'Who reported?' he was saying. 'Yes, quite right. I'll go along myself.'

Helplessly, hopelessly, Janet shook her head. He would have to go, of course, but that was not all: whenever he talked in this way, he *wanted* to go. He would always put his police work first, the boys and her afterwards. No doubt it was inevitable and even right, but sometimes she reacted against it bitterly.

He replaced the receiver and came back. 'There's some trouble at Sir David Marshall's place,' he told her. 'It's only just along the road, I shouldn't be very long.'

He had virtually forgotten her by the time he was out of the front door. It was raining; all the neighbours who had been in their gardens when he had come home had been driven indoors. His own garden looked neat and colourful, but now he hardly noticed it.

So far, all that he knew was that there had been some kind of a fight. That in itself was strange; one did not think of men of Marshall's calibre becoming involved in any sort of brawl. He was a student of social conditions in the countries of the British Commonwealth and a Consultant to the Government, and at the same time he

was bringing a series of Commonwealth reference books up to date. His own work, as far as Roger knew, was the writing and editing of biographies of modern writers, comparing them with writers of similar status from past eras.

Roger had been to his house some five years earlier—on a night when Lady Marshall had tried to kill herself. He remembered Marshall as the central figure in a kind of Greek tragedy, a man he had respected, but had not even begun to understand.

He wondered what changes the past five years had made in the man. He also wondered if this affair were as straightforward as the report made it sound, for often there were secret documents at Marshall's house, dealing with vital issues of Commonwealth relations. There had been at least one leakage of such documents which had set two emergent nations at each other's throats because details of British aid to each had been disclosed.

It was certainly a matter he should deal with himself.

. . .

Henrietta sat opposite the open front door, telling herself that she must go into the study and see Gerry. It was the last thing she wanted to do, but she had been sitting here for at least five minutes, and if she didn't hurry she would still be here when David came out of the cloakroom.

She gave an involuntary shudder, at the memory of the two men fighting.

Then she saw a car pass the gate, and a man at the wheel look into the drive. She had an impression of a good-looking man, very intent on the house. But it was too late for uninvited callers, and she was almost certain David was not expecting anyone; she must have imagined the stranger's interest.

Making a conscious effort she stood up and went towards the study.

The car had stopped and the man was getting out.

She hesitated, a hand on the study door, but before she opened it the man appeared at the gate. His stride was long, and he appeared to be in a hurry.

Henrietta turned away from the study, towards the front door.

The stranger reached the porch.

'Good evening,' he said.

'Good evening.'

'Is Sir David Marshall in?'

'I'm afraid'—Henrietta hesitated, wondering whether, in fact, David did expect the caller—'he's not free for some time.'

'I very much want to see him,' the stranger said. 'I wonder if you'd be very kind and let him know I'm here.' As he spoke, he took a card from his pocket and handed it to her. His eyes were steely grey, and despite his diffident manner, Henrietta had an impression of great determination.

'*Chief Superintendent Roger West, New Scotland Yard*', she read.

'Does he know you are coming?' she asked, startled.

'I'm afraid he doesn't,' said the man from the Yard. 'It's Miss Lyle, isn't it? Sir David's secretary?'

Henrietta was astonished that he knew her name.

'Yes,' she said. Then, suddenly, she had a mental picture of David coming out of the cloakroom, his face puffy, his jaw swollen—the last thing he would want was to meet this man. All at once her mind slipped back to normal, and she knew exactly what to do.

'Do come in,' she said. 'Will you wait for a few minutes while I find out if Sir David is free?' Leading Roger through the hall, she ushered him into her own office, forgetting completely that she had left this house,

determined never to come back. 'I won't keep you long,' she added, and closed the door on him.

Quickly, she went across to the cloakroom and tapped. 'Just a moment,' called David. Henrietta stood waiting, wondering why on earth the man had come from the Yard just then.

The door opened, and she had quite a shock.

Even after bathing his face, David's jaw and temple were still badly swollen. Both eyes were puffy, and the front of his shirt was stained pink from blood.

'I'll go upstairs and change my shirt,' he said. 'Is there anything you need first?'

'*I* don't,' she said, 'but there's a policeman—a detective—from Scotland Yard here. You *can't* see him like that.'

'I don't know that I can see him at all,' David said. 'What does he want?'

'He didn't——' Henrietta began.

As she spoke, she heard a door open, saw David look suddenly past her. Swinging round, she saw Chief Superintendent West, who hadn't been fooled at all.

'Good evening, sir,' said West easily.

'Good evening,' responded David, obviously speaking with difficulty. 'How can I help you? It is Superintendent West, isn't it?'

'Yes, sir. I'm sorry to trouble you, but we received a report that you were having a spot of bother and might need some help.' Tactfully, West averted his gaze from David's face. 'I was informed and came at once, sir.'

His voice was not loud but it was clear and carrying. Gerry must be able to hear every word, Henrietta thought. She remembered the passion and the hatred in David's voice, so short a time ago; now was the moment when he could really vent his spite.

'Don't, David,' she prayed silently, 'please don't.'

# 6

## ADVICE FROM A POLICEMAN

My God, he's had a beating, thought Roger West, shocked. The feeling he had known earlier, that one did not associate such men as Marshall with this kind of violence, was even stronger. He waited for an answer, doubting whether he would get a true one, sensing the girl's anxiety.

Would Marshall pretend nothing of consequence had happened?

'I am afraid you were brought out on a fruitless errand,' David said at last. 'Who made the report, Superintendent?'

'A neighbour, sir,' answered Roger.

David smiled with some difficulty. 'Well, Superintendent, I'm grateful for your concern, but I'm afraid the neighbour was mistaken.'

Roger West hesitated.

In the same situation he would have reacted in much the same way as Marshall. It did not seem likely that the fracas concerned government documents, nevertheless the possibility had to be kept in mind—yet there was virtually nothing he could do unless Marshall made a charge, and obviously he didn't intend to do so. Roger was aware of the earnest gaze of the girl, without looking at her, then realised that he had no idea what had happened to the other man involved. He needed to find out.

'May I ask who was your assailant, sir?'

'There was no assailant,' David said flatly. 'Just a

quarrel between two friends. Nothing at all to worry about, Superintendent.'

The girl seemed suddenly to relax. In what way was she involved? wondered Roger. Had the fight been over her? Was she afraid for the other man?

'A rather violent quarrel, sir,' he murmured.

'Quarrels tend to be violent if tempers are lost. Superintendent, I must ask you to leave me to settle my personal affairs myself.'

'Yes, of course, sir.' Roger spoke soothingly. 'But there *is* a stage when personal affairs become public. Sir David, did this quarrel in any way concern documents which are entrusted to you in connection with your work with Commonwealth affairs?'

David looked genuinely startled.

'Not in any way,' he answered.

'I'm glad to hear it, sir. Where is the other person involved?'

'I really don't see——'

'I would like to assure myself that he is no more badly hurt than you,' Roger said flatly.

If Marshall made more difficulties then he might well have something to hide, he thought. The girl was alarmed again, he noticed, and she glanced towards a door close by the one which led to her office. Was the other man in there?

'I must say that I think you *are* being a little overzealous, Superintendent,' said Marshall. 'Henrietta—did Mr. Ward leave?'

'I'm not sure,' the girl replied.

'Will you find out.'

She moved quickly to the door at which she had glanced, and Roger noticed how slim she was, and how slender-waisted. Swinging the door open, she stood in the doorway, her back to the two men in the hall. Obviously she saw someone in the room beyond, but

Roger did not follow her; if he angered Marshall further, he might cause a lot of unnecessary trouble.

'Are you all right?' the girl asked.

'Yes, *I'm* all right. How is he?'

'I'll live,' said Marshall, moving towards the open doorway. 'You'd better come into the study, Superintendent, and meet my protagonist.'

West followed him into the large, book-lined room, with its big tall windows opening on to smooth velvet lawns, and found himself facing a heavily-built man in his late thirties, his eyes startlingly dark in his pale face. Henrietta Lyle was standing beside him.

'It appears that we were overlooked when we had our difference of opinion,' Marshall went on drily. 'This is Superintendent West, of Scotland Yard.'

Ward looked up sharply.

'Good God!' he exclaimed. 'Nothing better to do, Superintendent?'

'Is there a better job than keeping the peace?' asked Roger mildly. 'If you must have a private feud, gentlemen, I suggest you have the front door closed and the curtains drawn.' He smiled rather grimly at Marshall. 'Perhaps it's as well that I came round myself instead of sending junior officers, Sir David. Are you quite sure there's nothing I can do to help?'

'Quite sure, Superintendent—and I'm most appreciative of your attitude.'

'Then I'll be on my way, sir.'

'May I—ah—ask whether this will be officially reported?' Marshall asked.

'It won't reach the newspapers, sir—not through us, at all events.'

'I'm most grateful. Will you have a drink?'

'No, thank you, sir,' Roger paused, expecting the younger man to make some comment, but when none

was forthcoming he went towards the door. Marshall moved after him.

'I can see myself out, sir, thank you.'

The girl had slipped past Marshall; now she opened the door and led the way into the hall. Roger appeared to be going after her but suddenly swung round and looked directly at Ward.

'Do *you* wish to make a complaint, Mr. Ward?'

'Complaint?' echoed Ward. The dark eyes flashed from Roger to David, then back again to Roger. 'No, certainly not.'

Roger nodded, and this time went to the front door, the girl preceding him. He was impressed by the grace of her movements as well as by her promptness; she seemed to anticipate what was needed of her. As she turned, he saw that she was looking more relaxed now, and for the first time Roger noticed how clear her eyes were, and how beautiful a blue. She had small, nicely-shaped features and a very clear, slightly sallow skin. Now that he had a chance to look at her more attentively and in a better light, he realised how attractive she was.

Attractive enough to be fought over?

He was guessing, of course, and he decided there was no point in trying to confirm his guess. If this were the case, it was none of his business. He smiled.

'Thank you, Miss Lyle. Goodnight.'

She smiled back at him. 'Goodnight, Superintendent.'

Roger West went briskly to his car and drove away immediately. It had stopped raining now, and several neighbours were back in their gardens. A boy on a bicycle stared after him and Roger had a sense that he had been recognised. By the time he reached the corner of the street, however, he had put everything to the back of his mind, except a picture of the girl's face. It was not often that he was so impressed; there was a quality in Henrietta Lyle which might indeed have sparked off the

trouble. If it had, then more trouble might develop, and it might be a good idea to keep an eye on Marshall and perhaps the girl. He would have a word with the Superintendent of the Chelsea Division, say that Marshall's house might be broken into, or some such excuse. In fact it wouldn't be a bad idea to go and see the man on nights at Chelsea, and refresh his memory about Sir David and his wife.

Wife—yes.

It was easy to forget that there *was* a wife, who still had her rights by law. What had happened to her?

It was a pity in a way that he couldn't go straight home, but he needn't be long and Janet could amuse herself looking at television.

. . .

Closing the front door, Henrietta could hear David and Gerry talking in the study. Should she go in to them, she wondered. Suddenly she realised that her bag was in the study. She would have to fetch it.

She hesitated.

There was a whole string of unpleasant situations to face in the immediate future—situations which both David and Gerry seemed to relish, but which she hated.

Why *must* men want everything so cut and dried and exactly as *they* wanted it?

She was perfectly satisfied with things as they were, working for David, enjoying his friendship. Often, since Yolande had gone, they spent all day here, having lunch and tea and sometimes supper together, and now and again he would take her out to dinner or to the theatre. They were always the slightly delicate minutes on parting; he never wanted to leave her, never wanted to let her go. But he was never over-insistent.

If only he hadn't developed this ridiculous, almost obsessive antagonism towards Gerry.

And Gerry was nearly as bad; he, too, she sometimes thought, seemed almost obsessed. Over and over again he would steer the conversation round to David: what was he doing, where was he going, when was he coming back? He couldn't possibly be really interested, so it could only be because he was jealous.

It was as if each man bitterly resented any affection she might have for the other.

All these things passed through her mind as she waited outside the study door, unable to make up her mind whether to go into the study or not. She listened. At least the two were not shouting at each other, they were behaving like reasonable human beings.

Then she remembered the fight—and clenched her teeth.

Suddenly David's voice rose, for the first time.

'I really see no point in discussing it further, Mr. Ward.'

Henrietta opened the door and walked into the room.

'He's gone,' she said shortly.

'Henrietta——' began Gerry, getting to his feet.

'Don't let's talk any more now,' she said quietly. 'I'm going home.' She looked round for her bag, saw it on the corner of the desk, and picked it up. 'Goodnight, David. Goodnight, Gerry.' She turned quickly, by no means sure that these were the right tactics but nearly certain that once she left, Gerry would follow; the important thing was that the two men were not left together any longer.

David stood up behind his desk. 'I'll see you in the morning, Henrietta. Goodnight, my dear.'

This was the moment to remind him that she wouldn't be in tomorrow, but if she did, then Gerry would guess what had happened, and she didn't want to talk about

it—certainly not this evening. She looked across the desk at David, forced a smile, hardly glanced at Gerry, and went out.

She was halfway across the hall before footsteps told her that Gerry was coming after her. He did not call, but caught up with her on the porch—it was he who closed the door. As they walked towards the gate together, she saw David at the study window. He often stood there when she left after they had argued, or differed, or if they had been more than ordinarily close in mood.

He did not smile and did not wave his hand; and nor did she.

'Henrietta, we've *got* to talk,' Gerald began, as she turned into the road.

Henrietta stared ahead.

'I'm not at all sure I want to talk to you,' she said stiffly. 'You had no right to burst in like that. You behaved like a lout.'

'On the contrary,' Gerry said, 'it was David Marshall who behaved like a lout. Good lord! I saw him push you around as if you belonged to him. If I ever see him do that again——'

They had reached her car and she stopped, turned, and looked at him without expression.

'I don't want to talk about it.' She opened the car door.

Then Gerry did what David so often contrived to do—looked at her with a helpless, hurt look, in which there was contrition and pleading and a hint of despair. She steeled herself against it, and got into the car, but before she could close the door behind her, he leaned forward.

'Please come and have dinner with me. I have to fly over to Milan for a couple of weeks and I'll be leaving tomorrow afternoon. That's why I telephoned. I wouldn't have interrupted you while you were working

but for that.' He paused. 'Please come and have dinner,' he said again. 'David Marshall can have your undivided attention for fourteen days in a row while I'm away, but let me give you dinner tonight, if only to show that you've forgiven me.'

Looking up into those dark, magnetic eyes, Henrietta hesitated—and was lost.

# 7

## WARNING OVER DINNER

As Gerry ate, Henrietta noticed that he used his left arm and hand gingerly, but she said nothing about it for some time. Whatever happened, she told herself, she must keep off anything controversial, anything which Gerry might take to be a reproach. He had brought her to a restaurant in Fulham Road, a spot in which the tables were placed in small alcoves where customers could dine *tête-à-tête* and where, if they kept their voices low, they could talk without risk of being overheard. Gerry looked pale and one of his eyes was bloodshot, but he was at his liveliest. He was the quick-witted if rather over-gay Gerry, the kind of man whom, in theory, she could not like but who, in person, was very likeable. He could make fun out of the least likely situation and his running commentary on other diners, the service, the food, did much to take her mind off the day's problems.

But he could not dispel them completely. However hard he tried, however hard *she* tried, still they lurked on the horizon of her mind like dark clouds, threatening to obscure the sun. Sometimes they loomed nearer, and in those moments she felt almost afraid, as if she were being drawn into a situation beyond her control; then Gerry would drive such ominous fears away with a flippant remark which set her laughing.

A small, red-jacketed waiter came up with coffee in a silver pot.

'Will you have a liqueur, sir?'

Gerry glanced enquiringly at Henrietta, and she shook her head.

'Not tonight.' He reached awkwardly for the sugar to push it nearer to Henrietta, and almost knocked the cream over. She glanced up—and saw the way he flinched.

'Gerry, what is it?'

'Nothing at all, Hetty. Just a broken arm.'

'No, be serious.'

'I don't think it is broken, but it's devilish painful when I move it,' Gerry said. 'Warning to ardent lovers: beware the loved one's employer.'

Henrietta stared at him, wondering what to say. It had been inevitable that they should talk about what had happened and yet she had kept putting it off, hoping that perhaps it could be avoided. Now, she wondered how to keep the mood calm and unemotional.

'Gerry,' she said, 'I'm worried about your arm.'

'So am I. As soon as I've seen you home I'll go and have a word with a doctor pal of mine. She'll tell me whether there's any real damage done, and if she thinks there is, I can have it X-rayed in the morning.'

'You ought to go now. We must finish the coffee, and——'

'Hetty, dear,' said Gerry, 'you have to face up to the facts of life sooner or later, and it's no use tucking this particular skeleton away—it's got too much life in it.' His right hand closed over hers, and pressed gently. 'Your David Marshall's as mad as his wife.'

'Gerry, you shouldn't talk like that.'

'The truth is the truth. Let's face it.'

'He is the sanest man I know.'

'He's not sane, and you know it.'

'I'm not going to argue,' Henrietta said.

'Just for once you are,' said Gerry. 'No more evasions, they don't get you anywhere except into trouble. He'll drive you mad, too.'

'Gerry——'

'Like he drove his wife mad.'

Henrietta felt a sense of shock and anger. 'That's a wicked thing to say.'

'It was a wicked thing to do.'

'*She* nearly drove *him* mad!'

'That's the way he would put it to you, but——'

'You forget I worked for him while she was still there.'

'I don't forget anything. He fell in love with you, and had to get rid of Yolande. He succeeded.'

There was a long pause.

'You hate him, don't you?' Henrietta said at last.

Gerry looked at her very evenly, for a long time, while customers passed, and waiters passed, and Luigi, the proprietor, who came to ask if they had enjoyed the meal, passed also, because of the expression on his face. Henrietta wanted to look away, but could not make herself do so.

At last Gerry answered. 'Yes,' he said slowly, 'I do hate him. He stands between me and everything I want. You. But it won't be for long, Henrietta.'

A curious smile played about his lips, and suddenly Henrietta felt strangely afraid. All at once Gerry's face, the table, the candles, the entire restaurant, swam around her, and she felt a sudden mental and physical exhaustion. She couldn't stand any more—she must get home.

'Let's go, Gerry. Take me home—please.'

He sprang to his feet and came round to her, pulling back her chair, stretching out his hand to take hers. A few minutes later they were in the street.

The cool night air made her feel better, but even so it was with a sigh of relief that she reached her car. Evading Gerry's tightening arm, she slipped swiftly inside.

'But Hetty——' Gerry's face showed his disappointment, 'you're *not* going home straight away? I thought we'd go for a little stroll——'

But for once she was able to resist the power of the dark, persuasive eyes.

'Not tonight, Gerry. I really am terribly tired.'

'But Hetty——' Gerry's disappointment had turned to petulance, and suddenly Henrietta felt hunted, harried, pursued. Was this the way a fox felt, she wondered desperately, surrounded by the slavering pink tongues and shiny teeth of the hounds, the inane, terrifying savagery of the men who spurred them on? She had a sudden vision of a small, brown body, running, running . . . and hot tears pricked her eyes.

Quickly she slammed the car door.

'Goodnight, Gerry,' she called through the open window.

. . .

Joining the main stream of traffic at the corner of the street, she drove slowly and with great care, trying not to think. Yet thoughts came, unbidden. What had Gerry meant when he said that David had driven Yolande mad?—that he himself was mad?

She felt as cold as ice.

She was able to park the little car near the house where she had a small but very pleasant two-room flat, so she didn't have far to walk. She found the street door open, as it usually was until midnight, and went up to the top floor, which was hers. The staircase and landing were well-lit, and she opened the door with her key, switched on the light, then closed the door behind her.

Thank goodness David hadn't come. If he had——

She saw a white envelope on the mat and picked it up. His handwriting seemed to leap at her from the envelope. Dully, she thought: 'I needn't open it tonight.' But she knew that she would have to, that, tired though she was, she was physically incapable of going to bed with

the letter unopened. She dropped her bag and gloves on to the couch in the sitting-room, and opened the letter.

It said simply: 'Please telephone me. David.'

# 8

## THE PROMISE

'No,' Henrietta said aloud, 'No. I can't.'

She sat on the arm of the couch, the note in her hand. All she wanted was a long, slow bath, and to sleep and sleep and sleep.

'I can't,' she said again.

She did not get up for some time, and by the time she did begin to move about, she felt less adamant. What did David want? To say he was sorry, or to ask her to come back? Slowly, Gerry faded into the back of her mind, David came to the front, and she felt an unfamiliar sensation, an emotion she had known only slightly before. She had first experienced it soon after beginning to work for David and before she had learned of the truth about Yolande. It was a kind of excitement, of eagerness.

It was still only half-past ten; she could make up her mind to telephone later. She did a few kitchen chores, it was amazing how dusty everything got even when she wasn't in all day, then suddenly swung round to the telephone. She wouldn't rest until she knew what he wanted.

She dialled, slowly. FLA . . .

David answered so quickly that she knew he was sitting at his desk.

'This is David Marshall.'

'Hallo, David,' said Henrietta slowly.

He caught his breath.

'Bless you for calling,' he said gruffly. 'You must be worn out.'

'I am, rather.'

'Then I won't keep you long.' His voice was tightly

controlled, he was making as sure as he could that he did nothing to exasperate her. 'Please come in the morning. Whatever you decide to do about staying with me, please come tomorrow.'

'Very well,' she said. The words were cool, the tone was cool, and she did not intend that. But he did not appear to notice.

'That's—a great relief,' he said. 'You don't know how great. One other thing——'

'Yes?'

'How is Ward's arm? He came down with a terrific bump, and I think he caught it on the fender.'

Henrietta frowned. How *was* Gerry's arm, she wondered.

'Well, I think it has been aching a bit, but he's going to see a doctor friend tonight. He has to fly to Milan tomorrow and won't be back for a week or two.'

'Oh.' David sounded surprised, and seemed to check himself from saying something else.

'He—he thought you were hurting me, or I'm sure he wouldn't have come in as he did.' She hadn't intended to say this, but suddenly the words came out with a rush. 'I'm sorry about it, you disliked him enough as it was.'

'Don't worry about that,' said David. He paused. 'Goodnight, Henrietta,' he added suddenly. 'I—I love you very much.'

'Goodnight, David.' Henrietta's voice was soft. 'I'm glad I'll see you in the morning.'

She rang off and sat back on the couch for a few minutes, not quite sure how she felt but much more relaxed than she had been. David had sounded very composed; perhaps he had fought a battle with himself, perhaps from tonight on, if she did carry on working for him, things would be better. She glanced at the telephone. Would it be wise to telephone Gerry? He must

be feeling very low, especially with that arm. And as she'd telephoned David—oh, that was absurd, she didn't have to treat them both alike!

But she dialled Gerry's number, nevertheless.

There was no answer.

'Perhaps it's just as well,' she said aloud, and went to run her bath.

. . .

That was about the time that Roger West opened the front door of his house in Bell Street, and went in. Immediately, he heard Janet laughing, heard Richard telling some far-fetched tale of a triumph he had had at work. As Roger entered the living-room, Richard broke off.

'Hi, Dad, fancy seeing you! Let me just finish telling Mum this . . . And there it was, on my desk, beautifully typed, you know my typing! Exactly what he wanted. I'd written it even before he asked for it!—talking about my boss, Dad—*that* shook him.'

'I'll bet it did if you had less than one typing error a sentence,' said Roger. He went across and kissed Janet on the cheek. 'Sorry, sweet. Hope the evening didn't drag.'

'Scoop came in almost as soon as you'd gone,' said Janet, 'and then Richard. Was it anything serious?'

'In a funny way, believe it or not, I don't really know,' said Roger.

And it was true.

It was equally true next morning, as he drove along the Embankment to the Yard, went through the reports on his desk, heard the tale of the night's misdeeds, none of which appeared to be particularly outstanding, and dictated a few letters, mostly answers to queries from County police forces. There was a light drizzle outside,

and the office was cold and clammy. He kept pondering all he had heard about Lady Marshall and her husband from the Chelsea night Superintendent, and at eleven o'clock lifted the telephone.

'Is Mr. Coppell in?' he asked.

'Yes, sir.'

'Put me through, please . . . Hallo,' he said when the rather deep but casual voice of the Commander answered. 'Can you spare me a few minutes, sir?'

'It would help if I know who you are,' said Coppell. It was characteristic that although he must have recognised Roger's voice instantly, he preferred to pretend he had not, and to imply a reproof. One got used to Coppell after a while, but such a start was always off-putting.

'Chief Superintendent West,' Roger said, precisely.

'Oh, West. What's it all about?'

'It's difficult over the telephone, sir,' Roger answered.

'Hmphh. Better come along, then.'

Coppell rang off, and Roger put the telephone down slowly, and as slowly turned and went to the window. He stared out at the smooth, oily-looking surface of the Thames, and the grey mist, heavy enough to blur the outlines of Westminster Bridge, the London County Hall, and the new block buildings almost opposite the Yard. One day he would explode with Coppell—but he would gain nothing except satisfaction that he had torn a strip off the man. It certainly wouldn't do his pension any good, and it wouldn't recommend itself to Janet.

He found himself laughing; then remembered what had happened the previous evening when Marshall and Ward had lost their tempers. He was in a calmer frame of mind as he walked along the bare corridors towards the Commander's office.

It was also characteristic that Coppell, having made himself felt, should be affable, even hospitable.

'Come in, West . . . Cigarette? . . . Sit down.' He lit

his pipe as Roger lit his cigarette, settled back in an armchair, and waited.

'How well do you remember Sir David Marshall, sir?'

Coppell's heavy eyes widened momentarily, life seemed to glow in his fleshy, sallow cheeks.

'Very well. The Commonwealth Secretary blew his top when some documents Marshall had were mislaid—thought it was Marshall's fault, but it wasn't. The Commonwealth countries are so infernally sensitive these days we have to be devilish careful. What's he been up to?'

Does he *expect* Marshall to have been 'up to' something? wondered Roger.

'One of his neighbours . . .' he began, and told the story succinctly, having no doubt at all of Coppell's deep interest; his exasperation with the man had gone completely. He finished the direct report, and then went on: 'I looked in at Chelsea, after I'd left Marshall, sir.'

'Forrest on duty?'

He knew his stuff all right, noted Roger.

'Yes.'

'What did he say?'

'He remembered the beginning of the official trouble with Lady Marshall very well,' Roger said. 'She tried to kill herself—went absolutely off her head, apparently.'

Coppell pulled at his pipe. 'What else?' he asked.

'She went to a private sanatorium at Richmond—been there ever since.'

'Yes, but don't tell me Forrest left it at that,' growled Coppell.

'He said that Lady Marshall had received a series of anonymous letters, some accusing her husband of having an affair and planning to divorce her, others saying she was as mad as a hatter and ought to be in a home. The writer of the letters was never discovered.'

'Forrest make any guesses?'

'No, sir,' said Roger, puzzled. 'He didn't say anyone was suspected.'

'Cagey devil,' remarked Coppell, obviously with approval. 'Well, I'll tell you what *I* thought, and I wasn't the only one. I thought Sir David had decided to send her round the bend. Devilish cruel thing to do, if he did—don't quote me, now.' He puffed away, more human than Roger had ever known him. 'Mind you, she led him a hell of a life. Tragic, whichever way you look at it.'

Roger, recovering, phrased a question carefully.

'Did you have grounds for suspecting the husband?'

'You'd call it a hunch, Handsome.'

'Was there any circumstantial evidence?'

'Couldn't find anyone else with a motive,' Coppell said. 'Know they're first cousins, don't you?'

'I didn't.'

'Well, they are. And *she's* got the money.'

'Lady Marshall has?'

'He's got what he makes, she's got a quarter of a million.' Coppell chuckled. 'Not like you to let me tell *you* anything about a case, Handsome! You haven't done your homework on this one.'

'Obviously not, sir,' Roger said ruefully. 'It's time I did.'

'Yes.' Coppell studied him closely for an appreciable time, then took his pipe from his mouth. 'What made you go round to Marshall's place yourself?' he asked.

Roger hesitated.

'Go on. There must have been a reason.'

'I didn't want unnecessary trouble with a man of Marshall's reputation, for one thing. I knew about the confidential documents and the trouble over the lot that were mislaid. And I suppose there was something at the back of my mind about this personal situation—can't say

I remember much about it—though I did go round on the night of the affair itself.'

'You wouldn't,' said Coppell. 'You went to New York at the time—lucky so-and-so. The Press didn't get hold of the story of the letters. There was no question of blackmail, nothing except what looked like an obvious attempt to send her off her rocker. Think this thing will develop?'

Roger shrugged. 'No telling, sir.'

'Think Ward and Marshall were fighting over the Lyle girl?'

'Possibly.'

'The letters started coming when she'd been working for Marshall for nearly a year,' said Coppell. 'She didn't know it, but she was watched very closely for over a month. Not the slightest reason to suspect her.'

'She knew about the letters, presumably,' Roger said.

'Not unless Marshall told her.'

'You mean *we* didn't question her?' Roger sounded incredulous, and it was immediately obvious that he'd said the wrong thing.

'We made quite sure she had nothing to do with them,' Coppell said, stiffly.

'Was Marshall fond of her then?'

'There's no evidence that he was,' answered Coppell. 'But all the evidence and reports are on file, and since you've already poked your nose into Marshall's affairs, you might as well have a look at them. Then you'll be able to make sure that all of us on the case did our job properly,' he added drily.

He's protesting too much, thought Roger. 'Is it all right if I dig a little?' he asked.

'Do what you like,' said Coppell. 'We'll give priority to anything urgent that crops up. Such as proving that Marshall knew about those letters to his wife,' he murmured.

# 9

## DECISION

HENRIETTA pulled up outside Number 5 Glebe Cresent, almost opposite the study window. She did not get out of the car immediately. It was futile to want to put back the clock; but how she wished that she could go back even to yesterday afternoon, with David in his tormented mood and she treading warily, never sure that she would not make a remark which would worsen his mood, either driving him to protest against her lack of feeling or thrusting him further back into a despondency which she felt duty-bound to try to lift.

Duty-bound?

*Why* was she always so convinced that she must help David out of a mood of despondency? Because she would help anyone? Or because he was David? Until she answered the question honestly to herself, she wouldn't be able to think clearly or to judge her own emotions. On that thought, she stirred herself and got out of the car, locked it, and went to the house, glancing up and down. There were only fifteen houses in Glebe Crescent, eight on the other side, seven, rather larger, on this. Except for one at the far end, a Queen Anne house built in the days when this whole area had been meadow or farmland, David's was the best—far enough back from the road to appear remote, yet close enough to be seen clearly. The wide, smooth lawns, the rose beds, the flagstones of the paths, were beautiful and distinctive.

It was an elegant house, in an elegant setting, and she would hate to leave it.

She nearly had left it—and perhaps, indeed, she had.

David had only to make the decision that having her here simply on a friend-secretary basis was too disturbing. He might already have reached the decision in the cold light of morning. Yesterday's crisis might have been the turning point.

If he had, she couldn't possibly blame him.

And, in some ways, she would welcome it.

She reached the front door, key in hand, and then said quite loudly: 'No I wouldn't. I'd hate it. I'd never get over it!'

Alarmed, she wondered whether David was in the hall. If he were he would have heard that, and one of his first questions would be, 'What would you never get over?'

He wasn't in the hall.

He was often at his study window, or at the door.

She hesitated, then tapped at the study door, to let him know she was in—but had he been in the study, he would have seen her, and surely made some sign. In some moods, when he had been hurt or affronted by something she had said or done unwittingly, he would wait for her to tap, and she could tell his mood by his tone of voice.

She tapped more loudly, but there was no answer.

Disappointed, she went to her own room, half-expecting to find him there, but this was empty, too. There were some letters on her desk with notes on how they should be answered, and her heart leapt. He *hadn't* taken her resignation literally! She took off her coat and draped it over a chair, pinned up a stray wisp of hair, took the cover off the typewriter and tidied the oddments on her desk. It was hard to believe that that police officer, West, had been in here. She recalled West vividly: his good looks, the hint of strength held on a leash, the easy exercise of self-control.

Where *was* David?

She heard a footstep in the hall, and for the second

time her heart leapt. His tread was brisk and firm. She half-rose from her chair as the door opened and he appeared. On that instant, and in spite of his swollen eye and mouth, she sensed that he was much calmer than she had known him for some time.

'Hallo, Henrietta!' He held out both hands as he came towards her. She rounded the desk and they gripped hands for a moment, then he put his arms round her, kissing both her cheeks before standing back.

Her eyes were glowing.

'Good morning, David!'

He smiled. 'And in spite of the storm last night, you look lovely,' he said.

'Thank you, kind sir!'

'I should say you slept untroubled and long.'

'I took a sleeping tablet,' she said simply.

'The practical Miss Lyle! Let's go into the study, I've things to talk about.' He moved towards the communicating door and stopped suddenly to take her hands again. '*Are* you all right?' he demanded, looking at her intently. '*Really* all right?'

'I think so,' she said. 'As far as I *can* be, first thing in the morning.'

He laughed, and let her go. 'Whatever you do, Henrietta, don't ever change,' he told her, holding the study door open for her to walk through.

A shaft of sunlight filled the room with an unfamiliar radiance. He had tidied up, and his own desk was in its usual immaculate order. He waited for her to sit down, studied her appraisingly, then, quite soberly, he said:

'I've made a decision.'

Suddenly, painfully, her heart contracted. She did not look away from him or change her expression, but slowly her blood seemed to turn cold. He had made a decision: he had decided not to go on trying to work out their relationship, but to take her at her word.

'I hope it's the right one.' She did not know how she made herself answer him.

'It's on your advice,' he said.

Again she forced herself to speak.

'Then you ought to be very careful.'

'Henrietta,' he said. 'I *am* over-tired, and if I don't have a rest I shall go to pieces. So I'm going to fly to Miami and stay with my cousin Chloe for two or three weeks until I feel—rested.'

. . .

He was going to Miami!
He was going to take a holiday!
Oh, what a fool she was.
Thank God, thank God!

. . .

David said: 'You don't seem very surprised. In fact you look delighted at the prospect of getting rid of me for a while.'

'Oh, I am! I——' Suddenly she realised what she had said, had a flash of alarm lest he should take it literally. 'I mean——' she amended, and then he chuckled and she found herself laughing. 'I mean I'm delighted that you're going away. I shall miss you, terribly, but——'

He laughed again. 'Oh, terribly,' he echoed, drily. Then he grew serious. 'I *can* forget what you said about leaving, can't I?' he asked. The question was almost absurd, coming at her moment of almost wild relief, and she didn't answer at once; and for the first time that morning he looked anxious. 'I simply can't bear the thought of you leaving,' he went on. 'I hoped that if I were away for a while you could have a spell without constant harassment.'

'Oh, don't be silly,' she replied. 'You don't harass me at all.'

'I do very much, sometimes,' he said soberly. 'You will stay, won't you?'

'Of course I'll stay!'

He looked at her a little uncertainly, then gave a faint smile.

'You said that as if you really want to.' Before she could comment, he went on: 'You can manage here on you own, can't you?'

'There's at least enough research to keep me busy for a month, quite apart from day-to-day routine,' she assured him. 'David—truly—I'm *very* glad. I'm sure it will do you a world of good. You want to get away from everybody and everything. In three weeks time you'll be absolutely on top of yourself!'

'I hope so,' he said, slowly. 'You've got one thing wrong, though. I do *not* want to go away from you, I'd be a thousand times happier if you would come with me.' He paused, as if half-hoping to see some kind of 'I'd love to come' expression in her eyes. 'What I would most like in this world is for you to live here, with me,' he went on, after a moment's pause. 'You do know that, don't you?'

'It—it wouldn't work out, David. It really wouldn't.'

'I suppose I *am* right,' she thought, 'I suppose it *wouldn't* work.'

He leaned forward across the desk.

'Henrietta,' he said, 'think about it while I'm away. Call it ungallant of me if you like, but you aren't getting any younger. Nor am I. We're wasting an awful lot of time—time we won't have again. Think seriously about it. We could get a living-in housekeeper to act as chaperone'—he was making himself speak lightly, but he was very much in earnest—'you *will* think about it, won't you? Promise me.'

'Of course,' she said gently. 'And David—don't think I'm not deeply touched. But you may have changed your mind when you get back, so let's wait until then.'

He stretched forward and touched her hands.

'I'm going to fly,' he said. 'I've already telephoned for a flight to New York and a connection for Miami, and I've written a note to Chloe. That's why I was out when you arrived. I wanted to catch the first post. When does Ward go to Milan, by the way?'

'This afternoon.'

'Have you any news of his arm?'

'None since I told you last night.'

'I hope it isn't too serious,' David said slowly. Then, all at once, he seemed to push out of his mind thought of everything but the coming trip and what she would have to do while he was away, and she saw yet another demonstration of his quite remarkable power of concentration.

There was no one, there could never be anyone, quite like him.

. . .

Roger West lunched in his office on a sandwich and a pint of beer, and studied the file on the Marshall case. It was surprisingly scrappy, and it became increasingly obvious to Roger that Coppell had never taken the case particularly seriously.

There were some notes on the law as it applied to anonymous letters.

There was a pencilled note, initialled by Jim Forrest, who was still at Chelsea:

*No one appears to have the slightest motive except Marshall himself. He would obviously benefit if his wife were put away.*

And there was a note signed by Coppell:

*There is no change in Marshall's domestic habits. The idea that with his wife away the woman Lyle might move in, has proved unjustified.*

Roger felt a touch of pleasure from his knowledge that, after two years, that situation still remained unchanged. He was rechecking the notes and reports in the file when his telephone rang. Still reading, he stretched out a hand for the receiver.

'West here.'

'Handsome?' It was Coppell. 'Funny thing's happened —you'd better check on it right away. Lady Marshall's had another letter, at the nursing home this time. The address is in the file. Go and find out what you can, will you? The woman you want to see is a Dr. Courtways—Doris Courtways.'

# 10

## THE BEAUTIFUL WOMAN

'IT is, I'm afraid, essential that we intercept all correspondence to our patients,' said Dr. Courtways. She was tall, an angular, handsome, Scandinavian blonde, very forthright in manner. 'We have to make absolutely certain that they receive no communications which might upset or worry them in any way. The slightest emotional disturbance might do incalculable harm. Here is the letter which arrived for Lady Marshall this morning.'

She handed Roger West an envelope which had an S.W.1. postmark.

The envelope had already been opened, and Roger took out a folded sheet of cheap writing-paper. There was no address, and no signature—simply a message clumsily printed in block capitals.

> *You're no more mad than I am,* Roger read. *But you will be if you stay in that hell-hole any longer. Your husband wants to get rid of you. That's why he had you imprisoned there.*

Roger read it three times. Hell-hole? he wondered. He had just driven through beautifully kept grounds to an Elizabethan house of rare beauty, furnished as if it were a rich man's beloved home. The brochure, a copy of which was on file at the Yard, stated that every patient had their own bedroom, bathroom, and sitting-room. In these days of hospital over-crowding, of shortage of medical staff, this was luxury.

'Are you Lady Marshall's personal physician?' he asked.

'One of two—yes. Dr. Smith is her consultant, but he is not resident here.'

'Plato Smith?' asked Roger.

'Yes.'

There was not the slightest need, in view of this, Roger realised, to doubt the absolute reliability of either the nursing home or the medical supervision. Plato Smith was an accepted authority on mental disorders, and was frequently consulted in cases of dispute in the civil courts. He had been called several times by defending counsel in criminal cases, twice in respect of murder, when the defence had been one of diminished responsibility due to insanity.

'So I may take it that the first sentence is not true,' Roger said drily.

'You may indeed, Superintendent.' Dr. Courtways was not even slightly amused.

'Is there any improvement in Lady Marshall's condition?'

'If she is kept unexcited and under constant supervision, she lives an outwardly normal life. But after visits from her husband she becomes very violent, and recently, I'm sorry to say, she has shown certain signs of deterioration.'

'Homicidally inclined?' asked Roger.

'Yes. If you care to see the record——'

'Later, please. How often does her husband visit her?'

'Perhaps once every two months. Sir David used to come much more often, but we dissuaded him because of of his wife's inevitable relapse afterwards.'

'I see. Did you tell him why you asked him to reduce the visits?'

'Yes.'

There was one extremely good thing about this woman: she did not waste a single word. She would make an excellent witness; one could not imagine her prevaricating or hedging, still less being at a loss.

'Does she have much correspondence?' Roger enquired.

'A cousin sends an occasional postcard from Miami Beach, in Florida. That is all.'

'May I see her?' asked Roger.

For the first time, Dr. Courtways hesitated, but only for a fraction of a second.

'Did you see her at the previous enquiry?'

'No. Other officers were concerned.'

'Do you need to tell her you are a policeman?'

'No.'

'Do you wish her to know you have come especially to see her?'

'Not necessarily. I would just like to see her,' Roger explained, 'simply so that I can have a clear picture in my mind of everyone involved in the case, if it should ever develop.'

'Very well,' said Dr. Courtways. 'Tea is usually served in the drawing-room between three-thirty and four-thirty, and we often have guests who are going to send patients here. I shall simply introduce you as Mr. West, and you will only meet Lady Marshall incidentally. But any clarity of picture in your mind, Superintendent, will be a superficial one only. I'm sure you understand that.'

'Perfectly,' Roger said.

'Then let us go.' Dr. Courtways stood up from the chair behind her scrupulously tidy desk, and led the way into the high ceilinged hall, the panelled walls lined with heavy oil portraits, the polished floors covered with intricately patterned Persian rugs. A maid in cap and apron was coming out of a doorway, carrying an empty

tea tray; as women often did, she shot a quick glance at Roger. Then he was taken into the drawing-room. It was elegantly furnished in pale, expensive colours, but the most striking feature was a long, leaded window, overlooking sweeping lawns which went down to the river, perhaps a hundred yards away.

In the room, two foursomes were sitting at card-tables, one playing bridge, one whist. On a big, roomy couch, a middle-aged man leaned back against the cushions. Sitting together in a corner of the room were two women and one man, and as Roger glanced their way the man said something which made both women laugh delightedly.

Dr. Courtways led the way towards the trio, and Roger wondered which woman was Lady Marshall. He recognised neither. They chatted, apparently normally, for a few minutes, and then Roger was taken to the bridge party, which had now broken up. There were the usual inquest comments on the game; all seemed sensible —this might be on board a luxury ship, thought Roger, or in the drawing-room of any private house during a house party.

'Mrs. Lidbetter, may I introduce Mr. West . . . Lady Marshall, Mr. Brash, Colonel Hull . . .'

Lady Marshall was, as he remembered her, tall and fair, with deep violet eyes; she was simply dressed, in a pale green linen suit with a single string of pearls at her neck. Her blonde hair was beautifully coiffured, and she was a strikingly attractive woman.

'Have you a friend coming to join us, Mr. West?' she asked, not recognising him at all. 'Or are you yet another official sent discreetly by the Home Office to make sure that we are all being properly cared for?'

Colonel Hull choked back a laugh.

'*Really*, Yolande,' protested Mrs. Lidbetter, who was

willowy, youthful, sharp-featured—and at this moment, sharp-voiced.

Roger smiled.

'I'm an official from the Home Office, of course.'

'Don't believe it for a moment,' said Colonel Hull. 'Not for a moment.' He was short, fresh-faced, alert, with a very slight squint.

'But *I* do.' The man named Brash spoke for the first time, but he had been staring at Roger intently. 'You're Superintendent Roger West of Scotland Yard, aren't you? Which of us has qualified for *your* interest, Mr. West?'

. . .

Roger held his smile, but it became set. He tried desperately to think of a good, quick answer but could not, and he was about to admit his identity when two things happened simultaneously.

'There is a continuing interest in the Hubble estate, Mr. Brash, as you know well,' said Dr. Courtways.

'*Got you, by God! Got you!*' bellowed Colonel Hull. He threw back his head and roared with laughter; it was almost possible to imagine a maniacal note in the sound. The man on the couch jumped up and began to walk about, talking to himself; as he drew nearer, Roger heard him quoting:

'*The sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children until the third and fourth generation. What did my forebears do? The sins of the fathers . . .*'

'So you're still on about the Hubble case,' said Mr. Brash; he had not looked away from Roger for a moment. 'Twenty million pounds and no one sure enough to know what to do with it. What are you trying to prove? The State's right to a private fortune? Doesn't this infernal government take *enough* away from us?

Here am I, certified insane, but my lawyers still have to pay surtax on my behalf. Infamous. Don't you agree?'

'You know that Mr. West isn't allowed to discuss politics, being a policeman,' Dr. Courtways remarked.

'You don't have to be a politician to know *this* government's no good,' said Brash, acidly.

'Surely you're permitted to have your opinions,' said Lady Marshall. Her lips curved back over small, pointed teeth, and Roger had the impression of a cat waiting to pounce.

'Oh, yes, I've opinions,' Roger said. 'I find it wiser not to talk about them, though.' Then he ventured: 'I'm never sure that I want to talk politics with a beautiful woman.'

'My, my! The gallant detective!' But the glow in the violet eyes showed that she was pleased. 'Why *do* men always assume that attractive women have no mind. Except on one particular subject, *my* mind is perfectly sound.'

'Dr. Courtways,' said Mrs. Lidbetter, unexpectedly, 'I think you'd better take Mr. West away before we feel we want to keep him with us.'

Roger laughed.

They all laughed, Colonel Hull quite naturally this time.

But when he was sitting at the wheel of his car outside the beautiful house, Roger did not feel at all like laughing. It was several years since he had come in contact with the problem which Dr. Courtways was trying to cope with, but he remembered how normal so many unbalanced people were. It was hard to believe that a woman so rational and so attractive as Lady Marshall, *could* be insane.

Yet he knew that she was.

What had gone on inside Sir David's mind when, after marrying a woman of such beauty, he had discovered the truth about her?

And how quick-witted Dr. Doris Courtways had proved to be. The Hubble case had been going on and on for twenty-five years, and made a perfectly valid excuse for him to be visiting the nursing home.

He was not back at the Yard until after six o'clock.

On his desk was a recorded telephone message from Chelsea Division. It said simply:

*Sir David Marshall flying Wednesday morning to New York en route to Miami.*

'Miami!' Roger exclaimed aloud.

. . .

He got the file out again, studied it, and left it on his desk for action the following day. He spent the evening at home, watching television, but deeply preoccupied.

The next morning he checked with Dr. Courtways that there had been no further anonymous letters, then sent the original with the envelope for examination for prints, infra-red photography and close scrutiny by a hand-writing expert.

Next, he confirmed that Marshall was, in fact, going to Miami, that Ward had already gone on business to Milan, and that Henrietta Lyle still lived in a small flat of her own, and led, as far as anyone could judge, an exemplary life. Feeling uneasy about Marshall's sudden decision to fly to Miami, he telephoned a friend in the Commonwealth Relations Office and asked what work Marshall was doing.

'He's studying some documents which seem to imply that two newly-emergent Commonwealth nations are planning a coup against each other,' he was told. 'One seems to be receiving Russian aid, the other American. If the documents were made public it could cause a lot of

trouble—and possibly lead to civil war in one of the emergent nations.'

'I'd like to know what he takes with him,' Roger told himself, and he telephoned the London Airport Police, who in turn had a word with Customs; an excuse would be found to go through Marshall's baggage very carefully before he took off.

But in spite of all these things, Roger felt that it was an inconclusive, unsatisfactory day.

. . .

Henrietta Lyle did not leave Number 5 until nearly ten o'clock that night. She had worked through the evening with only a brief break for a light supper, and David had concentrated continuously on the work he was doing. As she drove off she saw him at the window, a hand raised. The light was behind him and she could not really see his face. She realised with a sharp pang that it would be three weeks at least before she saw him again, and as his plane left at nine-thirty the following morning there would be little time for talking. Only once or twice had he touched, and then lightly, on the relationship between them, and she felt almost disturbed. Then she laughed at herself. He was forcing himself to behave exactly as she wanted him to and she still wasn't satisfied!

He was looking very tired.

The holiday would do him good.

She reached her apartment. It seemed very bare tonight, and very ordinary, cold, not so much in temperature as in atmosphere. Oh, she was absurd! But to lose both David and Gerry at the same time *was* a bit hard. She did her usual chores and turned on the television for the late news, but had hardly settled down to watch it when the telephone rang.

'David,' she thought, and stretched a hand for the receiver.

'Hallo?'

'Can Miss Henrietta Lyle take a personal call from Milan, Italy, please?'

'Milan!' exclaimed Henrietta; then added quickly: 'Yes. This is she.'

I can't be difficult with Gerry *now*, she told herself. She had thought hardly at all about him during the day, there had been so little time, but now the method of their parting came back vividly. The one certain thing about Gerry was that he never gave up. Someone obviously not English was speaking, then, suddenly, she heard Gerry's voice.

'Hallo, Hetty!'

'*Gerry!* How lovely. But you *shouldn't* have called from Italy!'

'To be sure I was forgiven I'd have called from Timbuctoo,' he told her. 'And to be sure you can't have an absolutely uninterrupted spell with that boss of yours, I shall call you at least once a day! Seriously, I hated myself last night.'

'No more than *I* hated you for a few minutes,' Henrietta admitted, half-laughingly. 'But don't telephone, there's no need—David's going to Miami to visit his cousin—and to have a few weeks rest.'

'You mean you're there alone?' cried Gerry. 'And to think I've chosen these two weeks to be away!' After a moment's pause, he added: 'I wonder what he's up to? There's some dark motive behind—no! Hetty, don't ring off, please don't ring off!'

'But Gerry, it's so *expensive*. It'll cost you a fortune.'

'Worth every penny,' said Gerry firmly. His voice was so clear, he might have been in the next room. He made no further mention of David, but spoke amusingly of the flight to Milan, his fellow passengers, his hotel. Yet when

at last she did put down the receiver the phrase which lingered on her mind was: 'I wonder what he's up to? There's some dark motive behind——'

It was nonsense, of course.

Wasn't it?

# 11

## THE MURDER

THE next morning Roger got up in a mood which he did not understand, for there was no reason for it. He had a sense of dissatisfaction with himself, with his sons, and with Janet. The others were quick to notice it.

'Case going sour on you, Dad?' asked Martin-called-Scoop at breakfast.

Roger glowered at him.

'Jolly nice morning!' exclaimed Richard-called-Fish, brightly. 'Just the morning for a flip in a Tiger Moth—if only I had the money for a Tiger Moth!'

'Think yourself lucky you can afford to have flying lessons,' said Roger tartly.

'Or unlucky,' said Janet, pouring out coffee. 'Why on earth you ever gave him permission to fly I'll never know. Every time he goes up I worry in case he never comes down.'

'That's one thing you *can* be sure of,' said Martin, straight-faced. 'If he goes up, he'll come down all right.'

Janet caught her breath, but before Roger could comment, Scoop said contritely:

'Sorry, Mum. Only a joke.'

Roger studied them while eating. Martin, not tall but broad-shouldered, and handsome despite a nose broken boxing in his schooldays, always seemed happy with life; but nothing ever went really right for him, and Roger knew that inwardly he was seriously troubled. Richard, the livelier of the two, was in some ways doing better than was good for him. Roger saw the anxious way in

which Janet looked at them both. He ought, soon, to make time to discuss Martin's future with the boy, but in his present mood he would probably do more harm than good. Then he saw Janet looking at him, pointedly, and that exasperated him, chiefly because he felt at fault.

'What are you doing this evening, Scoop?' he asked.

'Night-classes and girl-friend,' his son answered promptly.

'Which is easier to cut?'

'Night-classes!' said Martin mischievously. 'But why do you want to know?'

'Your father wants a talk with you,' Janet said severely.

'The one you warned me would be bound to come some day?' asked Martin, just a little more sarcastically than Roger liked.

'You've a lot of things coming to you one day,' he said drily. 'Tonight, nine-thirty, here—without girl-friend, Scoop.'

'Right, Dad,' said Martin, a hint of contrition in his manner.

'Anything you can do for me at the same time?' enquired Richard airily. He did not mean it rudely, Roger knew; the boy was always anxious to help Martin to fight his battles, and no doubt he could see a battle of sorts forthcoming.

'No thanks,' said Roger. 'I'll deal with you separately.' He glanced at the clock in the rather old-fashioned, shabby kitchen. 'Hey, I must be off!' He half-wished Janet would not follow him into the hall, but she did, as always. He took his hat off a peg on the hallstand, and said lightly: 'Keep reminding me—I'd hate to be late tonight.'

'I'd hate you to be, too,' said Janet. 'So would Scoop. Roger.'

'Hm-hm.' He was on edge to get off.

'*Are* you worried?'

'Er—no. No. Do I seem to be?'

'Much more than usual,' she told him. 'Preoccupied might be the better word.' She put her face forward for a kiss. 'Is anything going to stop us from getting away?'

'Oh, I don't think so for a minute!'

'Because if it is, don't worry,' Janet said. 'I'd rather not have a holiday this year than feel you had to leave a case that mattered to you.'

On that instant, Roger's mood changed completely. Putting an affectionate arm round her shoulders, he held her for a moment, as if reluctant to let her go.

'And when you're reminding me about Scoop and nine-thirty, remind me how lucky I am,' he said.

She was waving from the door when he drove off.

In an unbelievably happier mood he drove through the thick of the morning traffic along Kings Road and then through Victoria, reached the Yard a little after half-past nine, and was humming to himself as he walked along to his office. There was no new job for him, simply old ones to check over, and by ten o'clock he had finished another skimming of the Marshall case. Nothing useful had been found on the anonymous letter, no further information had come in from the Commonwealth Office. Marshall had caught his plane, but no report had come in from Customs; had there been anything in his luggage open to suspicion, he would surely have been stopped. This time Roger took a much closer look at a photograph of Lady Marshall; compared with the real woman it looked flat and almost dull. It was those unusual violet eyes that gave such life to her face, he thought.

Making a conscious effort, he began to check the details of a diamond robbery case for the Old Bailey, the next moment his telephone rang.

He lifted the receiver. 'West speaking.'

'Come and see me *at once*.' It was Coppell, and the

Commander's tone suggested he was in the worst of possible moods. 'And get a team ready—you've got to go out to Richmond pretty damned quick. Lady Marshall's been murdered.'

• • •

Roger sat at his desk, absolutely unmoving, for perhaps sixty seconds. Then, slowly, the self-discipline of the policeman asserted itself. Richmond: he must talk to the Superintendent in charge, Jim Callen. They would have the essential facilities at the Division, but for this he needed Yard experts, those men with just that little something which made them outstanding. Wilderson, for fingerprints, Larson for photograph, Sloan for general investigation. He'd better telephone Sloan straight away.

Sloan, still at Chief Inspector's rank, had a desk in an office occupied by four other C.I.'s. Would he be there? wondered Roger.

'Sloan here,' came a voice, a few seconds later.

'Bill,' said Roger. 'I want Wilderson, Larson, and you ready for Richmond in fifteen minutes, with the best second men for each one of the team you can get.'

'Right, sir.'

'Who do you know at Richmond?'

'Montmorency,' said Sloan.

'Talk to him, tell him we're coming over about the death of Lady Marshall.'

'My God!' exclaimed Sloan.

'Tell him I'll talk to Superintendent Callen as soon as I'm through with the Commander.'

'Right.'

As Roger replaced the receiver, the telephone bell rang again.

'Hallo, Handsome—remember me?' a man said.

'I might if I knew who you were,' Roger said, trying not to sound impatient.

'Jim Johnson, of the London Airport Police. But I can tell you're in a hurry,' Johnson went on in a different tone. 'Sir David Marshall's baggage was all clear.'

'Did you see him yourself?' asked Roger.

'I stood by.'

'What did he seem like?'

'Battered, but normal enough,' Johnson told him.

'Thanks a lot,' said Roger appreciatively. 'I'll be out to see you soon.'

Once again the telephone bell rang as soon as he replaced the receiver. This time, not surprisingly, it was Coppell.

'When the hell are you coming?' he rasped.

'I'm on my way, sir.'

Coppell thumped the receiver down. Roger went straight out of the office and banged into another Superintendent, who promptly buttonholed him.

'Hi, Handsome. Heard the latest about Wilson?'

'If I wait for it you'll have heard the latest about me,' said Roger, and freed himself.

When at last he was at the door of Coppell's office, and tapped, he heard Coppell's voice but no summons. He opened the door. Coppell, speaking on the telephone, waved him in without pausing in what he was saying.

'Well, we can't work miracles ... Yes, West's in charge ... No, I can't handle it myself, sir, and he knows more about the case than anybody ... Yes, sir, right away.'

Coppell rang off.

'Does Marshall know?' he demanded.

'I haven't enquired yet.' Roger paused, then added flatly: 'He's on his way to America, by air.'

'Why the hell wasn't I informed?' exclaimed Coppell.

'It was in my written report, sir,' Roger said mildly.

Coppell grunted.

'Find out if his secretary knows anything.' He picked up the telephone again. 'Get me Sir David Marshall, Number 5 . . . What's the name of that Street, West?'

'Glebe Crescent.'

'Glebe Crescent, Chelsea . . . Tell anyone who answers that Superintendent West wants him.' He banged down the receiver. 'That was the Assistant Commissioner—he wants action. You'll be in the dog house if you don't solve this one without wasting time. I——'

'I don't waste time,' Roger said quietly. 'And I won't get results any quicker if the V.I.P.'s are breathing down my neck. I've been in touch with London Airport—had Customs look over Marshall's baggage in case he was taking any confidential documents with him. Johnson of the Airport said there was nothing.'

'They won't want to know how bright you are,' grunted Coppell, 'they'll want the killer.'

Roger ignored this. 'Do the Press know, yet?' he asked.

'Not as far as I know, and the Courtways woman promised she wouldn't say anything until we get out there. I'd better——' Coppell broke off as his telephone rang, picked up the receiver, then banged it down again. 'No answer from Marshall's place. That Lyle girl hasn't gone off, too, has she?'

'Not as far as I know. I'll have her checked and the house watched. Anything else for me now?'

'Get cracking,' Coppell ordered.

'I've got Sloan, Wilderson, and Larson on the move,' Roger said. Shall we manage with the Richmond Police Surgeon, or take one of our top men?'

'I'll have Quinn standing by,' said Coppell.

. . .

Roger sat in the back of his car with Sloan at his side, and Larson, the Yard's photographic expert, in the seat next to a plainclothes man at the wheel. There wasn't much to say because little more was known. He had learned that Dr. Courtways had telephoned the Yard and been put through to the Commander; she had first asked for West, but he had been engaged.

'Wouldn't have made any difference,' Roger said to Sloan. 'The plane left an hour before we heard about it.'

'Do we know how she died?' asked Larson. 'Not one of these chopper jobs, I hope.'

'Strangled, according to Richmond.' Roger had talked to Superintendent Callen, just before leaving, and they were going straight to the nursing home, where Callen would meet them.

'Any special angle to follow?' asked Sloan. He was a big, fresh-faced, schoolboyish-looking man who was now running to fat, which made him less wholesome-looking than he had been when he and Roger had first worked together. Weight, marriage, and possibly disappointment had slowed him down in more ways than one. He had resigned himself to being a top-flight second-in-command, and if he were ever moved up to Superintendency it would be towards the end of his career, and because of seniority. He could carry out orders, but somehow could not make decisions quickly enough to ensure his promotion.

'It's going to be tricky,' Roger told him. 'Particularly if we run into any of the patients. Dr. Courtways may prevent it, but it may not be possible.' He related what had happened only two afternoons before, and an uneasy silence followed.

Traffic was very thick. It would be twelve o'clock before they reached the place, but it was no use worrying, Roger told himself and then glared out of the window, because he *was* worrying.

Those violet eyes——

Could it be argued that Yolande Marshall was better off dead?

Roger pushed the thought aside. It wasn't relevant. What mattered was who had killed her and why, and whether Sir David Marshall could possibly know anything about it. He had already started enquiries, through the Yard's legal department, to find out who would benefit from Lady Marshall's death.

Her husband, presumably; perhaps also the cousin in Miami.

And one other person; a person who would benefit enormously because Marshall was now free to marry her.

Henrietta Lyle.

# 12

## CAUSE FOR ANXIETY

HENRIETTA watched the huge jet aircraft take off, saw the streamers of dark fumes behind each engine, and waited on the observation roof of the airport until the machine had become only a speck in the sky. All the time she had been watching she had been aware of the roar of other aircraft landing and taking off, of voices over the public address system, of movement in the crowd below, the constant bustle as aircraft were reloaded and provisioned and made ready for new journeys to new lands and new peoples.

At last she turned and walked away.

David had telephoned her early that morning, and asked her to come with him to the airport, and she had scurried to get ready and be on time. But she had hated the actual moments of parting, and had told David that she wouldn't wait. They had said goodbye in the main lounge, long before he had boarded the bus which had taken him to the aircraft. Perhaps she should have gone home then. She wasn't used to this strange, empty feeling; now, she could almost understand what he meant when he told her how he felt when she left him.

She walked with forced briskness back to the big multiple-storey car park. He had driven here in his car, she was to drive it back. It was much larger than hers, and she was still a little awkward. A young B.O.A.C. officer, watching, grinned across at her.

'Shall I drive?' he called.

In spite of herself, she laughed; it was the kind of thing Gerry would say. She waved, and he waved back.

Two young men thumbed for a lift, but she shook her head. In these days it wasn't safe to stop for anyone, she told herself—feeling, nevertheless, a pang of contrition as she passed them—but the next moment they were forgotten, as thoughts of David flooded back to her mind. It would be strange not to see him for so long, but the time would soon pass, she must concentrate on what she had to do. Despite convincing herself that she felt much better she was glum for most of the drive, and when she put the car in the garage and locked the garage doors, she felt almost sorry for herself. But Miss Toms, the 'daily' who was more than a daily, tall, gangling, raw-boned and with very prominent eyes, called to her from the kitchen.

'Got him off safely, then?'

'Yes—he's the better part of a thousand miles away by now.'

'I never did trust those aircraft,' declared Miss Toms. 'I had a boy-friend who was a pilot once, always late, he was. Going to be in for lunch?'

'Yes—can you get me a snack?'

'I'll leave a tray,' promised Miss Toms.

Henrietta passed the open kitchen door and was almost at the door of her room when the other called out in a tone of alarm:

'Hey! I nearly forgot!'

Sugar, tea, coffee, milk, meat, bread—Miss Toms nearly forgot something every day.

'What's that?' called Henrietta, over her shoulder.

'I meant to leave a note on your desk,' said Miss Toms, striding behind her. 'My hands were wet, that's why I didn't. A policeman called.'

Henrietta spun round on her heel.

'*What?*'

'Said he wanted Sir David and the next best thing would be you.'

'Did he say what he wanted?' asked Henrietta, annoyed that the police were making such a fuss, and fearful that the caller had said enough to let Miss Tom put two-and-two together.

'No—but would you call him back.'

'Was his name West?'

'No, but he said he was speaking *for* a man named West.'

'What name am I to ask for?' enquired Henrietta.

'Tomlinson—Detective-Sergeant Tomlinson. That's not a name *I'm* likely to forget,' declared Miss Toms, delighted with herself.

Henrietta glanced at the clock; it was a quarter to twelve, she had been an hour getting back from the airport. Better get the call over. She sat at her desk and dialled, asked for Tomlinson, and was put through almost at-once.

'Tomlinson here.'

'I understand you asked me to call you,' said Henrietta. 'This is Henrietta Lyle.'

'Henrietta?—*oh!* Miss Lyle?'

'Yes.'

'Where are you speaking from?' the man asked.

'Sir David Marshall's home,' said Henrietta, a little puzzled by his tone of voice. 'Is it about——?'

'Is one of our men there, Miss Lyle?'

'A man from Scotland Yard? No. Why should there be?'

'He's late, then,' said Tomlinson. 'I'm sorry to be so mysterious, but will you please wait until he comes and say nothing to anyone else before you talk to him. He'll be a Detective-Sergeant Cousins.'

'Will you *please* tell me what this is all about?' demanded Henrietta, and, as she spoke, heard a ring at the front door bell. 'Someone is here now,' she said. 'It may be your Mr. Cousins.'

'I'd be most grateful if you'll check,' said Tomlinson.

There were footsteps in the hall—Miss Toms, making sure she was at the door first. Puzzled, and aware that there must be something more than she yet knew, Henrietta said: 'Yes, hold on,' and stood up. As she did so, a shattering thought struck her: *David's plane might have crashed.* 'Oh, my God, no!' she exclaimed.

She realised that the colour had drained from her face as she opened the door. Miss Toms was admitting an unexpectedly elderly, grey-haired man. Henrietta had an impression of a lined face and of piercing slate-blue eyes.

She made herself speak evenly.

'Are you Detective-Sergeant Cousins?'

'Yes, Miss. Are you Miss Henrietta Lyle?'

'Yes. What has happened?'

He looked at her squarely, and Miss Toms gaped, scenting excitement if not scandal. Henrietta clenched her hands with impatience.

'What would you think might have happened, Miss?'

'Anything!' she exclaimed. 'A Mr. Tomlinson from the Yard is on the telephone, now you—*has the aircraft crashed?*' She could not keep the anguish out of her voice.

'Lord save us!' gasped Miss Toms.

'Aircraft——' Cousins began, then broke off hastily. 'No, miss, that's not why I'm here. No aircraft's crashed that I know of. I'll be glad if you will spare me a few minutes.'

'Certainly.' Henrietta forced a smile, and led him through to her office. Cousins, moving very quickly for a heavy man who must be nearly sixty, went across to her desk. 'May I, Miss Lyle? . . . Thank you.' He picked up the telephone:

'That you, Tommy . . . Yes . . . I shouldn't think so . . . Yes, of course.'

He rang off and turned to face Henrietta, and she

sensed that he was watching her very closely indeed, that he was going to try to catch her off guard.

'How long have you known about Lady Marshall's death?' He made the question into an accusation.

Angered by his manner and worried by the uncertainty, Henrietta heard the words but did not immediately take in their meaning. It was the way he looked at her searchingly, that really brought the significance of the question home. And as it dawned, so her expression changed, surprise, disbelief, horror, following one another across her face.

'*Dead!* But she *can't* be dead,' she said at last.

'I'm afraid she is, miss.' Cousins' voice was flat, unemotional.

'But—but—David—Sir David—would have heard about it!'

'Hadn't he?'

'Of course he hadn't. Almost the last thing he told me to do was telephone Dr. Courtways regularly and enquire——' She broke off.

'Was it indeed,' said Cousins slowly.

'Please tell me why you're here?' Henrietta spoke fearfully. 'What has it to do with the police, even if Lady Marshall *is* dead?'

'She was murdered, miss. Strangled. They found her this morning.' Cousins might have been talking about the weather.

Henrietta caught her breath. Yolande—*murdered*!

But people one *knew* were never murdered. Only strangers, people one read about in the newspapers. *Yolande*. It was impossible.

As the thoughts raced through her mind, uncontrolled, once again she had a strange feeling that this man was trying to catch her off guard. But why should he? she wondered. Surely—*surely* he couldn't suspect that she, Henrietta . . . That David . . .

It was monstrous.

It was more than she could stand.

'I'll be glad to help in any way I can, but I think I had better talk to Superintendent West . . .' Her voice sounded hollowly in her ears, her knees trembled. In a few moments she would begin to cry. Biting her lip, she led the way back to the hall.

Cousins, following her, did not ask any more questions. When he had gone, however, there were two uniformed policemen outside, one at the front door, one at the front gate.

Back in her office, she sat down at her desk, shivering. Making herself lift the telephone, she called Dr. Courtways, but the doctor was not available. She tried three times, then forced herself to start typing some letters which David had been anxious to have posted today; but she had no sooner put the paper in the machine than there was a tap on the door, and in came Miss Toms.

Two gentlemen had called from the *Daily Globe*, said Miss Toms, could Miss Lyle spare them a few minutes?

Henrietta shook her head, bending pointedly over the letters, and Miss Toms turned reluctantly away.

The next moment the telephone rang. Henrietta snatched up the receiver—could this be Dr. Courtways?

'*Evening News* here, miss. I wonder——'

'I'm sorry.' Henrietta depressed the receiver rest, waited for the dialling tone, then tried for the fourth time to get Dr. Courtways, but still without success.

The moment she replaced the receiver, the telephone rang again. It was another reporter.

'I'm sorry.' Wearily, Henrietta replaced the receiver, and, on the instant, the bell rang yet again.

This time, it was Superintendent Roger West.

. . .

The most vivid moment of Roger's day, one which would stay in his mind for a very long time, was when he saw Lady Marshall lying back in bed, her head on one side, her beautiful violet eyes closed, her mouth slack.

Dr. Courtways related the story quietly and without emotion. It was normal, she told Roger, for patients to sleep as long as they wished. Lady Marshall had not called for her tea by ten o'clock, this had been reported, and a nurse had gone to check.

'I was told at once, Superintendent, and immediately tried to speak to you. When you weren't available I asked for Mr. Coppell.'

'I'm glad you did,' Roger said. 'You understand that everyone will have to be questioned, unless we get results very quickly?'

'You mean the patients?' Dr. Courtways looked questioningly at Roger, and he nodded. 'Yes. Yes, of course. Any one of them is *capable* of committing the crime, Mr. West——' she was talking a shade too quickly, her only outward show of nervous tension, 'I can only pray that none of them actually did so.'

'What chances are there of anyone breaking in?' Roger demanded.

Dr. Courtways frowned. 'Our main purpose is to make sure that none of the patients can break *out*,' she said. 'I'm afraid that that may well answer your question. Oh, well——' she shrugged, 'I have arranged for the Secretary—in fact for all the staff—to be entirely at your disposal. And there is a room on the ground floor, with a telephone, for your exclusive use.'

The rest of the day, Roger, and the members of his team, checked, questioned, took photographs, and tested everything in the room for fingerprints. The night staff was brought in and questioned, four of them in all.

None reported anything unusual.

None of the patients appeared to have left their rooms.

The front door was always locked and bolted; the back and two side doors also, but as all the patients were on the first floor, a night nurse in constant attendance, there was always a tendency to be careless with downstairs windows.

'So someone could have broken in,' Roger said. He was nagged by the fact that Marshall had flown to Miami on that very morning.

He talked to the local Police Surgeon and to Jack Quinn, the consultant pathologist at the Yard. Both agreed that a stocking had been slipped beneath Lady Marshall's head, and drawn tightly round her neck until she was dead.

'But why didn't she cry out?—make some attempt to fend off her attacker?' Roger asked. 'The night staff had heard nothing and there had been no signs of a struggle.'

'She was very heavily drugged,' Quinn told him, 'the normal practice, apparently. She would have been unaware of what was happening.'

Someone had crept into that room, taken the stocking, wound it round Lady Marshall's throat—and drawn it tighter and tighter.

'Could a woman have done it?' Roger knew the answer before he put the question.

'Of course.'

It had been half-past three in the afternoon when Detective-Sergeant Cousins had arrived at Richmond. It was nearly half-past four when he reported back to Roger at the nursing home. The moment Roger saw him, he sensed excitement.

'Let's have the big stuff first,' Roger ordered.

They were in the room which had been put at his disposal, one which faced a hedge on one side of the grounds. In the past few hours Roger had interviewed at

least twenty people here and would probably interview as many more before the day was out.

'It could be big stuff, at that, sir. Sir David Marshall went out in his car at five minutes to twelve last night and returned a little after two o'clock this morning. The neighbour who reported the incident between him and Gerald Ward, saw him leave and return. He could easily have gone to Richmond and back in that time, sir.'

# 13

## A MASS OF EVIDENCE

ROGER watched the other man's face, saw the depth of his satisfaction, and did the one thing which told him how seriously he took this news. He lifted the telephone and dialled the Yard, asking as he did so:

'Found any corroborative evidence yet?'

'Two men on the beat saw a dark-coloured Rover 2000 which could have been Marshall's, heading towards Putney.'

'The right direction. Mr. Coppell, please . . . West.' He held on. 'What else?'

'I had a talk with Miss Lyle, sir. Incidentally, she thinks——'

Cousins broke off a fraction of a second before Coppell spoke into the telephone, and Roger sensed that he had bitten his tongue to keep back what he intended to say. Then Coppell said:

'Well, Handsome?'

'Marshall is known to have gone out between twelve and two in the morning,' Roger told him. 'Can you get all the Divisions *en route* to check, sir?' That would be Chelsea, Fulham, Putney, and Richmond. 'They'll jump to it quicker for you than for me.'

'I'll fix it,' said Coppell. 'Anything else?'

Enough was never enough.

'If I had to go on what I've seen at Richmond, I'd say it was an inside job.'

'*Couldn't* Marshall—or anyone else—have got in?'

'They could,' answered Roger. 'But there's no evidence yet that they did. I've questioned all the staff, and

asked Richmond to check closer. The big worry they feel at the home is that it could have been a patient—but if it was, then one of the night staff slipped up.'

'What would that tell us?' demanded Coppell.

'If a patient opens a door it gives a signal, and no signal was noticed or reported. There's one other thing, sir.'

'Yes?'

'Motive.'

'Marshall's motive is a quarter of a million pounds,' said Coppell flatly.

'Willed to him, sir?'

'Yes. There are two other relatives, but they don't get enough to make it worth killing. This cousin—Chloe Renati—in Florida gets five thousand pounds, and her daughter gets one thousand. The only other bequests are to charities.'

'I see, sir.'

'And don't forget the Lyle girl,' said Coppell.

He rang off without another word, and Roger put down his receiver, looked up at Cousins, and asked:

'What, incidentally, *does* Miss Lyle think?'

'She thinks she had better talk to you, sir.'

Roger frowned. 'H'mm. What impression did you get of her?'

'If she isn't involved, sir, a pretty good secretary!'

'Well, she *is* involved. Anything to suggest a plot between her and Marshall?'

'Well, sir——' Cousins paused. 'There was one thing that made me think twice. When I first got there she was very much on edge. She appeared to be afraid my arrival meant that Sir David's aircraft had crashed—but that may have been to gain time to stall me. Nothing strong enough to put into evidence though, sir.'

'But you thought she had plenty on her mind?'

'As she would have if she knew what Marshall had—

sorry, sir!—if she had *reason to believe* that Marshall had killed his wife.' Cousins hesitated, then added: 'One thing's certain, sir, if she *is* Marshall's mistress, they hide it very well. The neighbour who saw him go out seems to spend her entire life at the window, and if Henrietta Lyle ever stayed the night there, I'm pretty sure she'd have spotted it.'

'Good point,' said Roger. 'Well, she did spot Marshall's excursion in the small hours.' He pressed a bell, and Sloan came in. 'Bill, take down all the pertinent points of Cousin's story, then you'll be up to date. If you need me for anything urgently you'll get me at Marshall's place.'

'Right, sir!'

Roger went out. His car, together with the other police-cars, was parked at one side of the nursing home, so as to be as unostentatious as possible. Despite this precaution, however, half-a-dozen newspapermen converged on him the moment he appeared.

'Anything new, Superintendent?'

'Any arrest?'

'*Is* it true that Sir David Marshall has fled the country?'

'To *Miami,*' a man called incredulously.

'Nothing new, no arrest, nothing to say,' said Roger. He paused long enough for two photographers to take pictures, then got into his car.

'To the Yard, sir?' asked his driver.

The newspapermen were within earshot.

'Yes,' said Roger.

As the car turned out of a side entrance, a crowd of a hundred or so people surged forward, mostly elderly men and middle-aged women, but a few couples with young children. The appeal of a murder case to so many people never failed to disgust Roger. He sat back to concentrate, ignoring the craning heads, he redirected his

driver to Glebe Crescent, then called Sir David Marshall's number on his radio-telephone.

Henrietta Lyle answered, in her quite unmistakable voice.

'This is Sir David Marshall's residence.'

'This is Roger West, Miss Lyle,' Roger said. 'I'm on my way to see you. I'll be extremely grateful if you can wait until I arrive—I won't be more than an hour.'

'Then I'll certainly be here,' Henrietta Lyle promised.

Roger sat back and tried to concentrate. She had asked to speak to him, so it seemed likely that he might be able to persuade her to talk where Cousins had failed. The thought was hardly in his mind before the telephone rang in the car.

'West,' he said.

'Hold on, sir. Mr. Coppell would like to speak to you.'

Coppell was certainly behaving as if he were being pushed very hard indeed from above, thought Roger.

'West . . . I've two things,' Coppell announced without preamble. 'Marshall's car *was* seen at Putney Hill at ten-past one this morning—one of our patrol men saw him. He knows Marshall by sight. Second—can you search his home without a warrant?'

'Over his secretary's dead body, I imagine,' Roger said.

'Avoid a warrant if you can, but the A.C. will issue one in case you need it. Is that clear?'

'Perfectly clear,' said Roger. 'Any other news, sir?'

'Marshall's landed at New York and has been told about the murder—the only report so far says he took it very calmly.'

'Is he coming back?'

'If he doesn't,' said Coppell, 'then you'll have to go and get him.'

He sounded as if he meant exactly that.

. . .

Henrietta put down the telephone after speaking to Superintendent West, but did not immediately restart typing. Instead, she went to the kitchen to make herself some tea. If West was to be here in about an hour, then she ought to get as many letters as she could signed and ready for the post by the time he arrived; she wasn't likely to feel like doing much more after he had gone. She was standing looking out of the kitchen window, feeling oddly lonely and forlorn, when the telephone rang again.

'This is Sir David Marshall's residence.'

'Can Miss Henrietta Lyle take a personal call from New York,' the operator asked.

'*New York!*' she exclaimed.

'Sir David Marshall is calling her,' the operator went on.

'Yes,' Henrietta said, almost too tense to speak clearly. 'Yes, I *am* Miss Lyle.'

'The call will come through within the next ten minutes, please be as near the telephone as you can be until you've been connected.'

'Yes,' she said.

'Please replace the receiver, we will call you back.'

Henrietta put down the receiver, ran back to the kitchen, poured out a cup of tea, and hurried into her room with it. Thank heavens the call hadn't come an hour later, when West would be here. David must have learned of Yolande's death.

Suddenly, she thought: 'He *will* have heard, won't he? I *can't* have to break the news to him.' Then, after absorbing the shock of that possibility. 'Oh, well, if I have to, I have to.'

As she finished her tea, the telephone rang. If this was one of the nuisance callers who had been on the line most of the day she would scream.

'This is—Henrietta Lyle.'

'One moment please—your call from New York.'

'Henrietta,' David said with hardly a pause, his deep voice very clear. 'I was afraid you might have gone out.'

'Oh, David!' she exclaimed.

'You—you've heard the news, of course?' he asked, quite calmly.

'Yes. David, I'm so very sorry. I can't tell you how sorry.'

'Henrietta——' David's voice took on an urgent note. 'There's something I particularly want you to do for me.'

'Anything!' she exclaimed.

'Listen very carefully. In the safe built into the floor of the study, beneath the carpet under my chair, there are some papers—envelopes—marked "Family". On no account do I want the police to find them.'

'But—but why should they——' she began.

'Henrietta, darling, don't be naïve.' David spoke almost sharply. 'The police think I killed Yolande and flew out of the country to avoid being questioned. And it won't help to prove I'd made the flight plans *before* the murder; even if I *had* killed her, I'd have planned ahead. Have they searched the house yet?' Anxiety sounded in his voice.

'They certainly haven't!'

'It's no use trying to stop them, and they're bound to want to, soon. Get those envelopes, and bring them out to me, in Miami.'

'In *Miami*?' she echoed unbelievingly.

'Yes. Do exactly as I've done—fly to New York and wait at the airport until you can fly down to Miami. You have the address, The Royalty Hotel, Miami Beach.'

'But David——'

'It matters,' he said very simply.

'David, is it wise for *me* to bring them out to you? The police——'

'You don't mind taking the risk, do you?'

'Good heavens, *no*! But——'

David cut her short. 'Telephone Mr. Jonathan Wise at the United States Consulate, tell him who you are, and say you need a visa urgently—he will short-cut the formalities. If he, or the police, want to know what the rush is about, tell them you are bringing some important papers which I forgot. If they want to know what papers, show them the unfinished manuscript I'm working on.'

'Yes. Yes, I'll do that. But David, won't they think it——' desperately, Henrietta strove for the right words, 'Won't they think it *odd* if you don't come back? For the funeral and everything,' she added uncomfortably.

'They may,' said David. 'You probably do, too. But it's essential that I get those envelopes—essential that the police don't see them and impound them for examination.'

She almost cried: 'But *why*?'

Instead, she said: 'I'll manage somehow.'

'I know,' he said gruffly. 'Bless you, darling. I'll see you in Miami.'

He rang off, without another word—and as Henrietta put her receiver down she realised that Superintendent West was due here in half-an-hour, that everything she did outside would be seen by the two policemen, that David had given her an almost impossible task. But even that was less important than the uncertainty which now flooded her mind.

Why was it so important that the police shouldn't see those documents?

And why wasn't David flying straight back to England?

# 14

## SUSPICION GROWS

HENRIETTA had never felt as she did now: as if whatever she did, wherever she went, she were being watched. She walked to the study window and looked out. The two policemen were talking together, at the gate. Moving across the room to David's desk, she pushed his heavily upholstered chair to one side, then knelt down and folded the carpet back. So long as she remained kneeling, she was hidden from the window by a filing cabinet.

She had her keys in her hand.

When David had first given her a key to the safe she had thought it unwise. Now, heart beating rather fast, she unlocked the door which fitted flush with the floor, and pulled it up. She knew exactly what to expect inside: a metal box which could be lifted out, and which contained all his confidential documents and usually a little money. She lifted it and put it on the floor, the openings of the partitions facing her. Each was locked. The envelopes, presumably, would be in the largest compartment and she unlocked this first.

Yes—there they were: three envelopes, buff-coloured, strong sealed, each one marked: 'Personal And Family.' She put these on one side—then thought she heard a sound at the window. Her heart leaped, and she peered nervously over the top of the desk.

A sparrow was perched on the window, where it was open.

She lowered the metal box back into the safe, which was self-locking, put the carpet and chair back into posi-

tion, and picked up the envelopes. They were large and cumbersome and certainly not easy to conceal.

Was David right? *Would* the police want to search the house?

Why was it so important they didn't find the envelopes?

Why——?

She fought the questions aside, one after another. She had only twenty minutes left, possibly less, and if she went out carrying a parcel, then the policemen would see her, and West would almost certainly be told. She *must* find a hiding-place which he wouldn't suspect, a way of taking these out of the house with her.

With the post!

She remembered David saying: 'The safest way to send a parcel is with open ends—no one ever thinks it worth stealing!' She often posted books and papers for him, between stiff boards. Hurrying into her own room, she packed the envelopes and strung them round in her normal way. Then, hardly thinking now but acting automatically, she put a label in her typewriter and addressed it to a bookshop with which David did a lot of business. Then she signed all the letters she had written, added a few which David had left for posting, and put them all in a pile on her desk. She had accomplished more than she had realised, the pile was quite large.

If West arrived 'within the hour' he would be here in five minutes. She went into the cloakroom, pinned up the loose ends of her hair, relipsticked, and then returned to her room. She felt calm enough, yet could not keep her eyes off the pile of post. At last she allowed her thoughts to run free.

'*Why* didn't David want these documents to be found by the police?' she asked herself.

'*Why* hadn't he taken the first flight back to England?'

'*Why had he run away?*'

A ring at the front door bell cut through the last question.

* * *

Roger heard the girl coming, quick, positive footsteps, in her way she was a very positive person. When she opened the door he was struck again by the brilliance of her blue eyes, and the pleasing regularity of her features; not truly a beauty, she was, in her thin-faced way, quite striking.

'Good afternoon, Miss Lyle.'

'Good afternoon,' she said. 'Do come in. Shall we talk in Sir David's study?'

She led the way, and once again he was impressed by this room, with its book-lined walls and antique furniture, its subdued colouring; it was a man's room, a scholar's room. 'Would you like to sit there?' she asked. She had decided in advance where to put him and he noticed with amusement that she placed him with the light from the window shining on his face while she sat with her back to the window. 'How can I help you, Mr. West?'

Was she being over-precise? Over-polite?

'In several ways,' Roger said. He hesitated, and then went on: 'We haven't yet discovered who murdered Lady Marshall.'

'It was—a terrible thing.'

'Yes. I find it terrible.' Roger was watching Henrietta's expression very closely. 'You understand, I'm sure, that we have to ask a great many questions and probe deeply before we get at the truth.'

She nodded.

'And that we need all possible co-operation.'

'Yes, of course.'

She appeared quite unflustered. Was she being a little

too clever? Roger wondered, or did he imagine it. He decided to bide his time.

'Have you heard from Sir David?' he asked.

'Yes—he telephoned only half-an-hour ago,' she replied unhesitatingly.

'From New York?' Roger realised that the question was superfluous, and went on hastily: 'When is he coming back?'

'He isn't.'

'He *isn't?*' Roger was unable to hide his surprise.

'No,' Henrietta Lyle insisted, and her voice became quite cold. 'I am sure that Sir David is the best judge of his own actions.'

'But my dear Miss Lyle, his wife was murdered in cold blood!'

'And I am sure he is greatly distressed.'

'Remaining in America, in these circumstances, hardly indicates that.'

She looked at him levelly.

'Rushing back to this country would only be pandering to public opinion, Mr. West. It wouldn't help Yolande.'

'But what about helping the police, Miss Lyle? It would make things a lot easier for us if he came back to England and answered our questions. And he was asked to return.'

Roger thought she showed some surprise at that, and went on quickly: 'Did he tell you *why* he wasn't coming back?'

'No,' she answered slowly. 'I *am* simply his secretary, Mr. West, and he doesn't always explain his reasons for any decisions he may make.'

'I suppose not,' Roger said, almost grudgingly. 'Are you in charge here during his absence?'

'Yes.'

'What about his housekeeper?'

'She comes in for two hours Mondays to Fridays,' Henrietta explained.

'I see. Well, I'm afraid I shall have to ask you certain questions, Miss Lyle, which would be better answered by Sir David.'

'I will answer as far as I can.'

'Thank you. Did he make arrangements for this visit to America this week or last?'

'Actual arrangements, this week. He has been thinking and talking of taking a holiday for some time, though.'

'Do you know why?'

'He's been overworking and badly needed one. He has a cousin in Miami, and decided to go and stay with her.'

Roger changed the trend of questions suddenly, to try to catch her unprepared.

'Have you any objection if we search this house, Miss Lyle?'

Henrietta looked astounded. '*Search!* Why on earth should you?'

'The police don't have to explain their reasons when they think a certain line of investigation is advisable,' Roger said drily.

Henrietta frowned. 'I have the strongest possible objections.'

'Why?'

Henrietta shifted her position in her chair, so that she sat upright with her hands clasped in her lap.

'The only possible justification would be if you suspected Sir David of Lady Marshall's murder. I cannot believe the police would be *quite* so ridiculous as that.'

'We have to take every possibility into account,' Roger replied, evenly.

'This is not even a possibility!'

'*Now* who is being ridiculous, Miss Lyle?'

Henrietta gave no indication that she was annoyed.

'I suppose we must agree that different things look ridiculous to different people, Mr. West.'

'Yes. Do you know whether Sir David has any plans to remarry?'

Henrietta looked up, startled.

'Good gracious, no!'

'Are you sure?'

'I am——' she began, then gave a rather forced laugh, the first artificial thing Roger had noticed. 'Now you *are* being ridiculous,' she said. 'He couldn't make plans for marrying again, being already married.'

'Come,' Roger protested. 'You can't be as naïve as that, Miss Lyle.'

He expected her to echo the word 'naïve?' in exasperation. Instead, after a considered pause, she said with every appearance of sincerity, as if she were examining the issue:

'I suppose I *am* naïve where such things are concerned. I do tend to take conventions literally. You mean that Sir David may have met someone else whom he would like to marry, and in order to be free, might have murdered his wife?'

Roger admired her directness, and was beginning to like the girl. As directly, he answered:

'Yes. *Do* you know if he was fond of someone else?'

Her eyes seemed to become more piercing, more blue, and certainly more beautiful. In a strange way she seemed to become more beautiful, too, to develop more character in her face, the more they talked. Roger had a feeling that she would always tell the truth, whatever the circumstances; then warned himself that he was crazy even to allow the thought to pass through his mind. She might well be a congenital liar.

'I know of only one person with whom he has discussed the possibility of marriage, if he were free—and that is *me*, Mr. West. There may well be others, I simply

don't know. I have never taken the suggestion very seriously.'

Roger looked at her searchingly.

'Are you stating that Sir David proposed marriage to you, and you rejected him?'

'I simply told him that as there wasn't any possibility of it, there was no point in discussing the question.' Henrietta leaned forward in her chair, as if about to get to her feet. 'As for searching the house, I've tried to think what Sir David would do if he were here, and I think he would agree. That is, if you're really serious.'

'I'm very serious.'

'Very well,' she said. 'When do you propose to start?'

'This evening—both start and finish,' Roger answered.

'Will you need me here all the time?'

'Won't you want to stay?'

'I suppose I should,' Henrietta said, reluctantly, 'but I must catch the post—I shall have to go to the main Post Office as it is—and I must have supper, and then I have to pack.'

'*Pack?*' echoed Roger, blankly.

'Yes,' she said. 'Sir David has asked me to join him in Miami. He left behind a very important manuscript which he wants me to take out to him.' She stood up quickly, as if the statement were quite unsensational, and went to the desk, picking up the post. 'I really *must* get these off, Mr. West, I'd quite forgotten.'

# 15

## DOUBLE DECEPTION

*'If he lets me go, the papers are safe,' Henrietta thought. She looked at West, the expression on her face one of transparent honesty. 'Oh God,' she thought, 'please let him let me go.'*

. . .

*'She's too good to be true,' Roger thought, getting to his feet. 'She's putting something across me. And she's very anxious to get off with those letters. Why?'*

. . .

It seemed an age to Henrietta; she couldn't keep up the pretence much longer. At times she had actually enjoyed the cut and thrust, but now she was near screaming point. Would he let her go or wouldn't he? Had she been too casual about allowing the police to search? He seemed to be trying to read her thoughts.

Suddenly, he smiled. 'Yes, of course. But may I have a look at those first?'

Panic flared up within her and she was sure it showed in her eyes. She clutched the bundle of letters and the precious packet tightly for a moment, then told herself there was nothing she could do but let them go; she would have to try to look unconcerned, that was all. She held them towards him.

West took them. 'Thank you.' He passed them from one hand to the other, reading the name and address on

each, showing no interest—not even when he looked down at the packet. Thank heavens she had put that address label on! 'Thank you,' he said again, handing them back. 'Will you come straight back here when you've posted them?'

'He's going to let me take them out,' she cried to herself, exulting inwardly. Aloud, and calmly, she said: 'Yes, if that will help.'

She turned away from him, praying that he could not read her exultation.

. . .

'She's got away with something,' Roger thought, 'and it's something to do with those letters.' He watched her carefully as she opened a drawer in the green-topped desk, and took out some stamps. Then he turned towards the door.

'I'll be back by the time you are,' he said, and went out.

The two uniformed policemen stood to attention. Roger's driver, chatting to them, moved smartly to the door of the car and opened it. But before getting inside, Roger beckoned to a plainclothes man who was standing close by.

'Hallo, Bob. Just the fellow I want; you must be psychic. Miss Lyle will be out in a minute, with nine letters and one packet—says she's taking them to the main Post Office. I want to know whether she does in fact go there, whether she posts everything, meets anyone else, the lot. Clear?'

'Nine letters and one packet—I'll see what I can do,' the plainclothes man promised.

. . .

Henrietta walked down the drive, and got into her car, easing it into the stream of traffic. Soon she was pulling up outside the Post Office. Feeling almost fiercely excited, she tucked the packet under the mat of the car, and went inside with the letters.

. . .

Roger was halfway to the Yard when the plainclothes man called him, in his car.

'She posted the letters, but she hadn't got a packet when she went into the Post Office,' he reported. 'She didn't meet or speak to anyone, though.'

. . .

Coppell was looking tired. His pipe was out, and a heap of half-smoked tobacco filled an ash-tray and gave off an offensive smell. As Roger went in, he bent down and took a bottle of whisky and two glasses from a cupboard in his desk.

'I'll use you as an excuse,' he said. 'What a bloody day. If they offer you this job when I'm gone, don't take it. You'll get more grey hairs in a week than you would in your job in a year.' He took out a soda syphon. 'Say when.'

'When . . . thanks.' Roger sat down, relieved by the other's mood.

'There's been one of those periodic "can't we cut down on expenses?" panics. And at the same time the old man's being pushed, so *we're* being pushed, over the Marshall case.'

'Why are they making such a fuss?' Roger demanded.

'Things are very touchy between certain Commonwealth African States, and some of those reports'—Coppell waved towards a pile of papers on his desk—'are

pretty scathing about one or two of our ministers. Lots of talk about hand-outs in return for contracts, arms coming from us and the Commies—red-hot stuff. Once in the hands of the wrong people, they could cause a hell of a lot of bother. Marshall's trusted with this stuff, so presumably his secretary is, too.' Coppell drank. 'No one's said the ugly word, "spy," but it looks as if it's in someone's mind. The fact that Marshall's nipped off to Miami makes the whole thing look devilish fishy.'

'His secretary follows him tomorrow,' Roger said. 'That is if we let her go.'

Coppell put down his glass. 'Follows him!' he repeated sharply. 'Why?'

'She says he left a manuscript behind, and that he wants her to take it out to him. But I'm not at all sure I believe her. And I'm pretty certain that she smuggled some papers out of the house, when I told her we were going to search it.'

Coppell frowned: 'Did you *know* she was smuggling them out?'

'I suspected she was up to something.'

'Then why let her get away with it?'

'Well——' Roger paused, 'if she *is* up to anything, she's now committed herself—at Chelsea she could have said she was simply considering following Marshall's instructions.'

'Crafty,' approved Coppell, and tossed the rest of his drink down. 'Anything else?'

'She didn't put up much of a fight to stop us from searching the place.'

'Meaning, the only thing that concerned her was getting those papers out,' Coppell mused. 'H'mm. What do you suggest?'

'Let her go, but delay her,' Roger said unhesitatingly.

'So?'

'So that I can get to Miami first. I need time to talk

to the Miami police and find out exactly who Marshall's gone to see. If there's a plane tonight and she's delayed until tomorrow afternoon——' He broke off, not sure how Coppell would take this, wondering what Janet would say, wondering why so much pressure was being put on the Yard to get results quickly.

Coppell gave a half-smile.

'You're one on your own, Handsome, I will say that for you. You mean let her take the papers and be on the spot when she hands them over.'

So he hadn't turned the suggestion down.

'Yes,' Roger said. 'Then if the papers aren't as innocent as she made out, and she and Marshall do have something to hide, they may break down and talk.'

'Not a bad idea—not bad at all,' said Coppell. 'And I can tell you there's an eleven o'clock Pan Am flight tonight and a midnight B.O.A.C., I've had it checked.' He gave a broad smile, delighted with his own foresight. 'Which plane will you take?'

'The B.O.A.C.,' said Roger, thinking of Janet. He gave Coppell a thoughtful look. 'I'll have Sloan in from Richmond to go through Marshall's place tonight and tomorrow,' he added, 'and then, if it's all right with you, I'll send him to Milan.'

Coppell pursed his lips. 'That man Ward? Why?'

'The quarrel between Ward and Marshall was very ugly,' said Roger. 'We still don't know what caused it, and I think we ought to find out. Sloan can talk to Ward in Milan tomorrow night, telephone a report to you—and if you think it's worthwhile, you can telephone me in Miami.'

'You'd never get away with this if I wasn't under pressure,' Coppell said. 'All right. Tell Sloan.'

'I'll call him right away,' promised Roger.

But he was still thinking more about how Janet would take the news that the holiday was to be postponed—in

an odd way, her attitude that morning made it more, not less, distasteful than it should have been.

. . .

'Lucky old Pop!' exclaimed Martin.

'Good old Dad!' approved Richard.

'If you can possibly stay for a few days after the case is settled, it would do you the world of good,' said Janet, as if quite unconcerned. 'But try to find an hour to talk to Martin before you leave.'

'No need, as a matter of fact,' said Martin, with his usual calm. They were all in the living-room, sitting round a blank television screen. 'I've given it a lot of thought—I have, seriously. And I'm going to give up full-time art study. Another chap I know has an art shop—picture framing, copying, that kind of thing. He needs someone to help, and I've enough general knowledge for him. I won't make a fortune but I *will* earn my keep, and study in my spare time.'

'Oh, *Scoop*!' Janet exclaimed. 'That's wonderful. Roger! Isn't it wonderful?'

She was commanding Roger to say yes.

'I'm very pleased,' Roger approved, and then looking squarely at his son, he added: 'But you'll have to stick to it, Scoop. It's a job, it's not——'

'Another way of getting all arty-crafty and long-haired,' Scoop finished for him. He grinned. 'I'll stick it out, Dad.'

'Now you can go to Miami with a clear conscience,' Richard declared, and ducked a blow his father aimed at him. 'Anybody want to see the news? Besides me, I mean.'

. . .

Henrietta did not understand why another detective came to the house, instead of Superintendent West, but it did not trouble her; her jubilation at having got away with the documents lasted all the evening, and was still with her the next morning. She telephoned Mr. Wise, at the United States Consulate, and, as David had assured her, he promised priority in the issue of a visa.

'Come to the Consulate at the side of the Embassy and ask for me,' he said.

Sloan raised no objection to her going, and as Miss Toms was in, Henrietta did not mind leaving the police in possession. Everything went very smoothly. Wise was a big, youthful man, alert and efficient. She was in high spirits when she left—but these were dampened when she faced up to an inescapable question: *why* did David want the documents?

West was right—it *was* remarkable that, having heard of Yolande's death, he should go on to Miami. Knowing him, she was quite sure that it was a matter of vital importance. She was preoccupied about this until she reached Number 5, but Sloan soon drove it out of her mind. Suddenly, although he knew she had to catch that plane, he became unbelievably slow and obstructive.

'I'm sorry, Inspector,' she said at last, 'but I *must* leave for the airport within five minutes.'

Sloan looked at her in his rather innocent, schoolboy-like way.

'I'm sorry, Miss, but it won't be possible. There are several questions which must be asked and answered before you go.'

'But this is ridiculous!' she stormed. 'I shall miss my plane!'

'There is another after lunch,' Sloan said soothingly. 'And I will have one of my men drive you to the airport.'

'But I insist——' she began, beside herself.

He cut her short, almost regretfully.

'If you attempt to leave, miss, I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to come along to the Yard. But I'm sure that can be avoided, if you'll co-operate with us now.'

Henrietta made herself remember that it was no use starting a fight she couldn't win. If she was too insistent, he might delay her even longer. It crossed her mind that it was all being deliberately planned to stop her from leaving, but nothing Sloan said or did indicated this. He was extraordinarily thorough in searching, and his questions were mostly to do with what work she did. He also asked for a list of regular visitors—there were, she suddenly realised, very few. It was surprising how lonely David must be. Somehow, she hid her vexation.

Sloan did not create any further delay, and he did, as he had promised, send her to the airport with a police driver. The policeman actually carried her brief-case to the airport lounge for her, the case containing the documents which David was so anxious to have.

There was nothing unusual about going to the airport and boarding an aircraft, but all her previous flights had been to Europe. Everything was the same: the waiting for the 'now landing' instructions, the formalities with Immigration and Customs, the little straggling line of people walking along the still-unfinished passages to the buses, the friendly stewardesses and stewards.

Yet it was all very different; and the fact that she had managed to get the documents out of the house without the police discovering them, filled her with a strange sense of exhilaration, an exhilaration which was still with her when the east coast of Ireland dropped out of sight, and there was only the ocean below and ahead.

The man next to her began to snore gently.

There was a sense of wonder for her, too. She made no attempt to read, it would almost certainly make her air-sick; but she closed her eyes and went over all the

questions which the police had asked her, everything she knew about the murder.

The flight took nearly seven hours.

It should, by English time, be ten o'clock when she reached New York. Instead, it was only five. She was half-afraid of more delays, but there was nothing except the inevitable wait to have her passport examined and her visa checked. Then she was told there would be a flight for Miami in just over an hour. There was no chance to go into New York but plenty of time to marvel at the vastness of the airport, the ceaseless roar of the coming and going of aeroplanes, the apparent casualness of everybody involved.

At last the call came for the Miami flight. Henrietta trooped along a covered way towards the bay where the aircraft was waiting; it was all incredibly smooth and efficient. For the first time she began to notice her fellow passengers, and found herself sitting next to an attractive Spanish woman who spoke little English.

Soon she settled down; again she closed her eyes, and concentrated—but on a different aspect of the situation. Was she justified in doing exactly as she was told by David without asking questions? As a secretary, perhaps, but—as a friend?

*Friend?*

She was going to see him so much sooner than she had expected, and already her heart was beginning to beat faster. He mattered to her very much more than she had allowed herself to admit in the past—more than she had ever realised.

How would he welcome her?

Why did he want those documents so desperately?

Why did the police so obviously suspect him?

She was hardly aware of flying over the flat land of the Deep South, hardly aware of the tall white palaces of the Miami Beach hotels. Anxiously she scanned the

people waiting at the end of the passage at the airport, sure she would see him, sure that he would come to meet her.

But he was not there.

Hardly able to believe it, not sure what to do—whether to get a taxi to the hotel, or wait, she hovered near the gate where she had come off the aircraft. Disappointment gave way to bewilderment, bewilderment to concern, and she was getting really worried when a deeply sun-tanned woman in her early sixties, heavily lipsticked, heavily mascaraed, wearing a brilliant pink candy-striped dress and a large, floppy, matching hat, came up to her.

'You *are* Henrietta, aren't you? . . . I knew I couldn't be wrong, you're so obviously British!' She took Henrietta's hand. 'David wasn't able to get here, so he asked me to come instead.' She held on to Henrietta's hand rather too long, and then added: 'You know who *I* am, of course—I'm Cousin Chloe!'

# 16

## COUSIN CHLOE

OH, no, thought Henrietta, this can't be *David's* Cousin Chloe! But she found herself drawn close, almost absorbed in a huge, cushiony bosom, and kissed firmly on both cheeks.

'How very nice to meet you,' she said at last, as soon as she was able to break away.

People turned their heads, as they often did at the sound of her voice.

'How very nice to meet *you*, honey,' enthused Cousin Chloe. 'Let me look at you, now.' She stood Henrietta at arm's length and raked her from head to foot with bright brown eyes. 'My, but you make me jealous with that figure of yours. And I'll bet you don't even diet! Now we must get your baggage—do you have very much?'

'Only one case and this.' Henrietta held up the briefcase.

'Let me take that for you,' said Cousin Chloe, stretching her hand towards it.

Henrietta tightened her grip.

'No, thank you, I can manage this easily.'

They walked briskly through the air-cooled rooms, which Henrietta found slightly chilly, until they saw the luggage coming down a conveyor belt and being picked up by the passengers. Henrietta's case was not in sight, so they stood waiting. Surreptitiously, Henrietta studied David's cousin. She was so unlike David—and for that matter unlike Yolande—that it hardly seemed possible she *was* his cousin.

Then she saw her case, and stepped forward. As she lifted it, Cousin Chloe stepped forward and took it from her; and Henrietta had a sense of someone who was physically very strong.

'This way,' said Cousin Chloe, and turned.

Soon, they were approaching the main exit from the airport, and suddenly Henrietta found herself in a steam bath. The sun was blazing, the sky a beautiful blue—but it was so hot she caught her breath.

Cousin Chloe was striding towards an enormous car park. Henrietta, breathing deeply, forced herself to follow. There was a strong smell of oil, and twice she brushed against a car and found it so hot she stung her hand. She knew that her face must already be shiny, and she could feel the perspiration on her forehead.

At last, Cousin Chloe stopped by an enormous white car; it looked big enough for two—*three*—of her little mini-car at home. She went automatically to the passenger side, and found herself staring at the wheel.

'Everyone from little old Britain does that,' declared Cousin Chloe, highly amused. 'I'll open your door from inside, honey.' Henrietta, still clutching her brief-case, so hot she could hardly believe it, walked round the car, which was radiating heat. David's cousin opened her door, leaned across and opened Henrietta's. The impossible happened. A gust of even hotter air blasted out of the car.

'Goodness,' thought Henrietta, 'I can't get in there.'

Cousin Chloe got in, apparently without a thought. Gingerly, Henrietta did so too. The seat burned hot through her skirt, and the temperature was so high she thought she would faint. Cousin Chloe slammed the door and turned on the engine, which started at a touch—and immediately there was another blast of air from the front of the car; this was cold.

'I don't know what we did before air-conditioning,'

remarked Cousin Chloe. 'When I first came here there wasn't any in cars.'

'But didn't you *bake*?' gasped Henrietta.

'That's just about right, honey—we baked.' Cousin Chloe moved the car off slowly. 'You feeling better now?'

'Yes. I—I'm all right.' In fact, unbelievably, Henrietta now felt almost too cold. 'How long have you been here, Mrs——'

'You call me Chloe, honey, and I'll call you Henrietta, we're in America now! Thirty-two years. And I was twenty-nine when I came, so now you know how old I am!'

'That was before the war, then,' murmured Henrietta, a little embarrassed.

'Just before the war,' agreed Chloe. 'You were hardly born, honey. I ran away.'

'I'm sorry, I didn't quite hear you . . .'

Cousin Chloe laughed.

'You heard but you couldn't believe me,' she said. 'I came away from Britain because Hitler scared the life out of me! And I came straight down to Miami. It wasn't the place it is now, but it was pretty nice even then. I took a job in one of the big hotels and I've been in the hotel business ever since.'

David had never said so, but Henrietta had always assumed that Cousin Chloe had money. As if reading her thoughts, Chloe gave another laugh, and darted a sideways glance towards her.

'I was on the poor side of the family—didn't you know there was a poor side?'

'I really hadn't given it any thought,' Henrietta said, truthfully.

'Well, I always did believe in calling a spade a spade,' said Cousin Chloe. 'David's not wealthy, like Yolande was. *Her* side had the money!'

'I knew she was very rich,' admitted Henrietta.

'You've said it, honey. All that dough—and to be crazy along with it! I surely felt sorry for Yolande.' Chloe darted Henrietta another sharp glance. 'And I feel mighty sorry for David, too.'

'He has had a very difficult time,' said Henrietta cautiously.

The laugh came again; was it a little forced?

'He's had a *hell* of a time, honey. Ever since he discovered what Yolande was like——'

'I—*do* forgive me, but I'm not at all sure I *should* talk about David. He *is* my employer . . .'

'Forgive you? I'll do better than that, honey, I'll ignore you,' said Cousin Chloe. She put a big, well-shaped hand on Henrietta's knee. 'I haven't had a chance of talking about David for so long I would burst if I didn't talk to you. You want to know something?' she went on, taking her hand away and turning the car into a wide road, pausing long enough for Henrietta to see that they appeared to be driving on to a huge bridge. The water on either side was indescribably perfect blue, and in the distance the sky-line seemed vivid white. 'I fixed David with an appointment he couldn't dodge, so I could come and talk to you and see what you were like.'

Henrietta's heart lifted. So *that* was why he hadn't come to meet her.

'You think I'm crazy, don't you, honey? So did the family—that's why they were glad when I came to America. I didn't do them any good in little old Britain! So, as I was saying, David had one hell of a time. I'm glad *I* didn't do what he did.'

All Henrietta's training told her she shouldn't listen; all her instinct told her that she wanted to know. She did not have to ask.

'I married a poor man for love, honey,' Chloe went on. 'Maybe that sounds foolish the way things are today, but

it's what I wanted and I'm not sorry.' Now she shot a glance, almost sly, at Henrietta. 'Do you believe in marrying for love or for money?'

Three things were going on in Henrietta's mind. The implication that David had married Yolande for her money, was completely new to her, and after her first reaction—to dismiss it as impossible—it filled her with misgivings. The fact that Cousin Cloe was probing, was quite obvious. And thirdly, the sky-line was not so distant now. It looked like a miniature city, crystal-white in the sun, with a foreground of equally brilliant blue.

Very precisely, she said: 'I'm not at all sure I believe in marrying at all.'

'You don't——' began Cousin Chloe, and then she roared with laughter, rocking to and fro, so that for a moment Henrietta was afraid she would lose control of the car. But she didn't.

'I didn't think I was going to like you, honey,' she gasped at last, 'but I surely am. You don't believe in marrying at all—that's poppycock!'

'What makes you think so?' asked Henrietta, mildly.

'You're a woman,' Cousin Chloe answered simply. 'David's quite attractive, and now Yolande's dead he'll be rich as well. He's quite a catch, Henrietta.'

Henrietta felt inwardly cold, and, in a strange way, a little frightened.

For a few moments all she could think of was the fact that David would become rich, that the police obviously suspected him, and that he *did* have a strong motive for murdering his wife. It was a hideous possibility.

Slowly, her thoughts were drawn from her, for now they were much nearer the white buildings, and the sky-line seemed full of them—white castles standing beyond that sea of unbelievable blue. The vista helped; it soothed her.

'You think that's beautiful?' asked Cousin Chloe, unexpectedly.

'Oh, I do!'

'Sure, it's beautiful,' said Cousin Chloe. 'Folk say a lot about Miami Beach which isn't in its favour, but gee, it's beautiful. It's just about the most beautiful city in the world. You're going to like it here.'

'I'll only be staying a few hours,' Henrietta remarked quickly.

'That's not the way David understands it, he's booked you a room for a week—I guess he wants to work you to death!' Cousin Chloe laughed raucously. 'And I don't mind telling you the Royalty is the most beautiful hotel in Miami Beach. It's the newest, it's the biggest, it's the best!'

'What do you do there?' asked Henrietta, trying not to think about being booked in for a week.

'I'm the Social Hostess,' answered Cousin Chloe. 'You got problems, folk?' she chanted, in exaggerated over-familiarity. 'Come and see Chloe, she'll fix them for you.' Her voice changed back to normal. 'And honey, do they have problems!'

Henrietta felt a surge of sympathy, not for the folk with problems, but for Cousin Chloe. What an appalling job, she thought. She was, in fact, astonished to learn that Cousin Chloe *had* a job—she had known she lived in an hotel, but had always assumed it was as a guest.

'As soon as we're back I'll be busy,' Cousin Chloe went on. 'So I want to talk to you as much as I can now. David's tired. He is so tensed up it isn't true. I want him to take a course of massage up in the solarium—the Royalty's solarium is the greatest! And he needs therapy, honey, he needs you around. Help him relax, you understand.'

They were turning off the main road, a causeway across the water between Miami and Miami Beach, and

Cousin Chloe slowed down.

'We'll be at the Royalty in five minutes,' she said as they paused at a traffic signal. 'David will be waiting for you and maybe he'll be mad at me. But you want to know something, honey? If I can persuade David to invest some of that money he's just come into, I'm going to quit the hotel business and buy myself a consortium apartment north of Miami and do nothing. Just precisely nothing! I'm sixty-one, Henrietta, and don't tell me I don't look it. Yes, sir, I certainly look it! I nursed a sick husband, I saw my only daughter ruin her life with a no-good Englishman—no offence, honey, but did she marry a heel! And one of these days I'm going to sit back and do what I'm always telling others to do—I'm going to relax!'

Henrietta looked through the car window seeing the white palaces at close quarters now, the driveways that led up to each, the palms, the hibiscus, the bougainvilia, and all she could feel was a tremendous pity for this woman.

Then they took a curve in the road.

Just ahead of them was an enormous modern building, dazzling white, with pale blue facings at the windows. It was approached by a palm-lined drive, which ran through rich lawns, dotted with fountains and marble statues of ancient Greek gods and goddesses.

'That's the Royalty,' Chloe said, and swung into the drive.

. . .

Henrietta felt like Alice in Wonderland.

Cousin Chloe took her through swing doors opened by uniformed doormen into a vast hall, two walls of which were lined with mirrors, giving an illusion of even greater spaciousness. The colourings of the huge couches and

chairs were green and gold and pale blue, the tables beside them were gilt and marble-topped. In the centre of the room was another fountain, beside it, two more statues. Apart from the ripple of the water, there was a strange hush, as if in fact only the statues lived here.

'I'm going to send you up to David. I have to go to the pool patio and make sure no one's got problems.' Cousin Chloe beckoned a uniformed bell-boy, a handsome Spanish-looking youth with thick dark hair. 'Pedro,' she said, 'take the lady up to eleven-o-one. You understand that?—eleven-o-one.'

'Sure do, ma'am,' said Pedro.

Chloe patted Henrietta's arm, and went striding away across the hall.

The bell-boy flashed a row of glistening white teeth at Henrietta and led her to a row of elevators, one of which stood open. He ushered her inside, pressed a button and the doors closed without a sound; almost before she realised they had started, the elevator stopped and the doors opened. They stepped out into soft-lit luxury in rose pink.

'Turn right, Miss.' The passage stretched an illimitable distance, they seemed to walk for a mile, until at last they reached a door marked 1101. As they reached it, it opened—and David stood there.

He held out his arms.

Pedro turned and walked softly away.

Henrietta had never known her heart beat so furiously, never realised how much it meant to look on David's face.

'Come in,' he said huskily, taking her case and leading her into the room. He closed the door, put the case down, then took her in his arms. After a moment he drew away a little, looked down on her, and lifting his arm, tipped her face up with a finger on her chin.

'My God, how I love you!' he said, and slowly, very

slowly, lowered his face towards hers.

Everything, *everything* else was forgotten. Henrietta knew the answer then, knew how much he mattered. She had never felt like this, her head was swimming, her body seemed to melt against his. Then suddenly, rudely, the ecstasy of the moment was shattered by a sharp rap at the door. David's body stiffened.

'Who's there?' he called harshly.

The words came clearly through the closed door. 'Chief Superintendent West, sir. I would like a word with you.'

# 17

## THE CONFRONTATION

'*West!*' gasped Henrietta.

'The Yard—here!' muttered David, his hands falling helplessly to his side.

Before he could speak again, before Henrietta had even started to recover from the shock, the door opened and Roger West appeared.

. . .

Roger saw how closely they were standing together, and he could still hear the echo of Sir David Marshall's vibrant voice as he had said: 'My God, how I love you.' Slowly, Marshall stepped back, and awkwardly, perhaps with some embarrassment, Henrietta moved slightly to one side.

'I will see you later, West. Not now.' Marshall spoke with some curtness.

'Now, sir, if you please.' The gentleness of Roger's voice did nothing to dispel its unmistakable note of authority.

'No. Later. You have no authority.'

West's expression was as bland as ever, his voice as gentle.

'I have the co-operation of the police of Miami and of Miami Beach, sir. I've no desire to call on them, and I hope there will be no need to do so.'

. . .

Henrietta thought with sickening anxiety: 'He wouldn't behave like this unless he *knew* something against David. He wouldn't dare.' And she thought: 'The Miami police wouldn't co-operate unless they were sure, too.'

She looked at David, only at David.

She saw the tension on his face, the drawn, near-haggard expression, the set intensity of his eyes which seemed to be looking into some secret hell.

She thought: 'David, oh David, what have you done?'

And she thought: 'David, David, how can I help you?'

. . .

Roger West, still standing in the doorway, studied the face of the man inside the room. The bruises no longer disfigured him, although one eye and one side of the mouth were still slightly discoloured. There might be tension in his expression, even pain; but fear? If there were fear, Marshall concealed it with remarkable success. West looked from him to Henrietta Lyle, piquant-faced, her beautiful eyes shadowed with dismay. There was something between these two which he did not quite understand, and the natural thing for a policeman to assume was—conspiracy.

'Well, sir?' he asked at last, looking back to Marshall.

David drew in a long, deep breath, then picked up the brief-case. 'You'd better come inside,' he said flatly.

West walked into a big, light, cool room, with wide windows. A chair was standing out from a small desk which was littered with papers, and two armchairs, low and inviting, stood by a round table in the window. The girl dropped into one of these as if her legs could not carry her any longer.

Roger glanced quickly at the window. It wasn't open, there was no way in which Marshall could get rid of the brief-case. In fact he put it on the round table, a brown leather, much-worn case with several labels on it: Rome, Paris, Zurich. Then he turned towards West.

'Superintendent'—his voice was well controlled, West noticed—'this is very like persecution. Why have you followed me from London?'

'Because I need to ask you some questions, sir, and you left London before I had an opportunity to do so.'

'You have gone to extreme lengths, surely.'

'It is a matter of extreme importance, sir.'

'What is it about?' demanded Marshall.

Was he deliberately playing for time? wondered West.

'Why did you leave England when you knew your wife had been brutally murdered, sir?' he asked.

'The first I heard of my wife's death was when I was told by a police officer at New York Airport.'

'I see, sir. In that case, why didn't you then fly straight back to London? Scotland Yard's request that you should was passed on to you, presumably.'

'It was, indeed.' Marshall gave a wry smile. 'In fact it was probably this which was the deciding factor in my continuing the journey to Miami.'

'You mean you were afraid to come back?' rapped Roger.

Marshall's expression did not change and his gaze did not waver.

'Not afraid in the sense you mean it, Mr. West. Not afraid of the police, or what they could do. But afraid of the publicity, the headlines, the stories of my wife's—ailment, the constant questioning by newspapermen, by you, the unpleasantness, the pressures, the nervous tension, yes. I was and I still am afraid of those things.'

The words conjured a vivid picture. But before Roger could comment, Marshall went on:

'Why are the police so interested in me, Superintendent?'

Roger chose his words with care. 'We believe you may be able to help us with the enquiries into your wife's death, sir.'

'Do you mean you think I killed my wife, and then ran away?' asked Marshall drily.

He's not afraid of facing the situation, anyhow, thought Roger. How should he answer, he wondered. He could either evade Marshall's counter-question, or take it at its face value.

'Yes,' he answered, after a brief pause. 'That is what we are considering.'

'Oh, *no*!' Henrietta leaned forward in her chair, her eyes enormous in her pale face.

Marshall stretched out a hand to touch her shoulder. 'What makes you think that? he asked, almost casually.

'Lady Marshall was a rich woman, sir, and you stand to inherit a substantial sum.'

'But I already have all the money I need, Superintendent. Is that the only evidence against me?'

Roger frowned. Was Marshall laughing at him, he wondered.

'No, sir. I understand that you left your home at five minutes to twelve on the night of the murder and returned two hours later. You were seen heading towards Putney—which, as you know, sir, is on the road to Richmond.'

Henrietta was gazing at Marshall, as if imploring him to deny that he had been out. Would he deny it? wondered Roger.

Marshall shrugged. 'Yes, I was out. And I drove past the nursing home. But I did *not* go inside, Superintendent.'

'Were you alone, sir?'

'I was.'

'Then no one can support your statement that you did not go inside, can they, sir?'

'No,' Marshall agreed. 'I'm afraid not. But——'

'David,' Henrietta interrupted in a tense voice, 'where *did* you go that night?'

'I drove past Yolande's nursing home to remind myself of what could have been,' said Marshall. His voice was strained. 'And I drove past your flat, to remind myself of what could still be.' The pressure of his hand on her shoulder tightened; then he withdrew it, and moved to the window. He stood silently for a moment, his back to the room, looking down on the brilliantly blue sea. Then, suddenly, he swung round to face West. 'I did not kill my wife, Superintendent, although I had both motive and opportunity.'

'Do you know who did, sir?'

'I do not.'

'Do you know of anyone else with a motive, sir?'

'No.'

Roger turned to Henrietta, and drew himself up a little more stiffly.

'Do *you* know of anyone with a motive, Miss Lyle?'

. . .

Henrietta looked at West blankly, then, slowly, she began to understand the implication of his question, and felt an icy coldness steal over her body.

West thought that *she* had a motive!

He thought *she* had wanted Yolande dead, so that she could marry David!

. . .

'If she does know anything, she'll crack now,' thought Roger.

'Miss Lyle—answer me, please.' His voice was sharp. 'Do *you* know anyone with a motive?'

Henrietta spoke with unexpected steadiness. 'No. No, Superintendent, I don't.'

'Do *you* have a motive?' Roger moved forward and gripped her forearm. 'Did *you* want Lady Marshall dead?'

'No!' cried Henrietta.

'Come on, Miss Lyle, let's have the truth! Did you kill——?'

'Of course I didn't!' Henrietta Lyle's expression changed, anger replaced shock and flashed in her eyes. 'You are impertinent, Superintendent. Let me go at once.' Haughtiness, imperiousness, now sounded in her voice.

But Roger thought: 'Why is Marshall so silent?'

. . .

Henrietta thought: 'Why is David letting him do this to me?'

. . .

'Superintendent,' said Marshall, very quietly, 'I understand that American police methods can be rougher than ours. Is this a case of when in Rome doing what the Romans do?'

Roger swung round on him. 'It's a case of finding out who killed your wife, sir.'

'You won't find out here,' Marshall retorted. 'Neither I nor Miss Lyle know anything about it. I concede your right to suspect and to interrogate, but not your right to manhandle Miss Lyle. Please don't do that again.'

Roger drew away from the girl and, for the first time, looked at the brief-case.

'Miss Lyle had a telephone call from you in New York, sir. I don't know the precise terms of the conversation, but I do know that Miss Lyle immediately flew to join you here. I also know that she had a package addressed to a firm of booksellers when she left me at your house, but that she did not post the package. I have reason to suspect that it is in that brief-case and that it contains certain papers.' Roger looked closely from Marshall to Henrietta. 'May I see those papers, sir?'

For a moment there was silence. Then Marshall stepped forward. 'They are private and personal.'

'I will treat them with absolute confidence, sir.'

'I repeat—they are private and personal——'

'I'm sorry, sir.' Roger spoke heavily. 'I think those documents may contain certain information of great importance to Great Britain and probably to other governments. And they may also give a clue to the reason for the murder of your wife. I'm afraid I must ask you to let me have that case at once.'

# 18

## THE DOCUMENTS

HENRIETTA thought, this gets more and more absurd; it's utterly ridiculous. David, a *spy*. David, a *murderer*? Had the police gone mad? She looked up at him, and saw the last thing she expected—a little twitch at his mouth, a characteristic when he was amused but didn't want to show it. He picked up the case.

'If you say so, Superintendent.' He held out his hand. 'Let me have the key, Henrietta.'

Henrietta fumbled in her bag, found the key, and held it out. David took it.

'Superintendent,' he said, 'I am not a murderer, nor am I a spy. In fact I am not a criminal of any kind.' He handed West the key.

'Thank you, sir.' Roger placed the brief-case on the table in the window, and something caught Henrietta's eye. She glanced up, to see an aeroplane pulling a sign across the sky; she caught the word 'steak'. Beyond, on that brilliant sea, were some small sailing ships and several white launches and, almost on the horizon, two large ships; she saw, yet was hardly aware of these. West was holding the case in one hand and inserting the key with the other. His movements were firm and deliberate; there was no fumbling, no missing the keyhole. He put back the flap which kept the case closed; and it sprang open.

She noticed that he kept his head on one side, almost as if he expected something to explode.

David was watching him as closely, still with that glint of amusement.

Inside, Henrietta knew, were the papers he had been

working on, her excuse for coming to Miami, and the three sealed packets. West took the open file out first, thumbed through it, then put it back. Any moment, thought Henrietta, he would find the packages still addressed to the booksellers still tied round with string. She remembered bitterly how jubilant she had been when she had smuggled it out of the house.

As she watched him, there was a sound at the door. Henrietta heard it a split-second before the men, and glanced round. By then the sound had become identifiable—very quietly, very cautiously, a key was being turned in the lock.

'Who's there?' called West sharply.

'The porter, sir,' a man called.

'I don't want a porter. Go away.'

There was a moment's pause, followed by another sharp click of sound, and the door was thrust back. A young man with a very pale face stepped swiftly inside, a gun in his right hand. He was thrusting it forward, towards West. 'Don't move!' he rapped.

He was followed by a dark-haired youth, Pedro, thought Henrietta, recognising the boy who had brought her up in the elevator. The man with the gun muttered something in a language which Henrietta did not understand, and Pedro came forward, moving slowly, stealthily, his brown eyes enormous, as if he were touched by fear. His hands were outstrectched as he looked from one person to the other, then at the briefcase.

'*Apurate!*' rasped the man at the door.

The youth started, then snatched at the case.

'*Apurate!*'

'What can be in it?' thought Henrietta wildly. 'What can be in it?'

'Aha,' thought Roger, 'so it *does* contain something that matters!' He had seen neither of the intruders before, but could tell that the youth was nervous from the way his lips quivered.

'Don't touch this case,' he ordered.

'Take it!' hissed the man in the door. He looked venomously at Roger.

The case was still in Roger's hands. He could hold on to it or let it go, and if he held on he had no doubt that the man at the door would shoot. Help should be at hand but it didn't appear to be, the men could get away with the case and everything in it.

The youth was gripping it now.

'Let him have it!' the man with the gun spat, in English. 'If you don't!'

Roger pulled it free and kneed the youth in the stomach, then raised the case in a single swift movement in front of his face. He heard the snarl of a shot, a gasp from the girl, the thudding as the youth backed away—and he felt a jolt against the case. There was a thump against his forehead, and for a few seconds everything went black. As if from a great distance, he could hear other, heavier sounds; another shot, then a roar which seemed to deafen him.

After that, a strange silence fell, lasting for a moment which seemed an age before a man said:

'Are you okay, Roger?'

Slowly, Roger put his hand to his forehead. To his surprise, he felt something wet.

'Yes, I'm fine,' he said; then stared down at the blood on his fingers.

. . .

Henrietta stared at the blood, coming from a wound in West's forehead, just above his left eye. The whole scene

was vivid on her mind, like a tableau. West, wounded; the case, slipping from his grasp; the youth Pedro cringing back against the wall; the man who had shot West lying on the floor, where he had fallen; a man in a pale grey suit holding a smoking gun.

The man on the floor had a big red stain on his white shirt, and Henrietta saw it was on the left side.

She sensed that he was dead.

Then, suddenly, everyone seemed to move at once. Other men came in from the passage, one of them in uniform. David turned to her and took her hands. In the distance someone said: 'He's dead,' and closer at hand another man said: 'You're hurt, Roger. Let me look at that wound.' Then, all at once, she was in David's arms, being crushed to him. She had never known such strength, never known what it was to be held so tightly.

For a while, it was as if there was no one else in the world but David; no sound but the whisper of his voice, 'Oh my love, my love, my love . . .' Then she heard West saying: 'Sir David . . . Sir David . . . Sir David . . .' The voice grew louder, and suddenly exploded in her ear, and she was blasted from the stillness and the oasis world into reality.

'*Sir David!*'

David drew back from her.

West stood nearby, touching David's shoulder. They must have been standing like that for a long time, for now there was a plaster on West's forehead, covering the wound. Behind him was the man who had fired the revolver. Over by the door, the man who had been shot lay with a sheet over him. A uniformed policeman stood by the open door, a man with a camera was aiming over his shoulder.

The youth Pedro had gone.

The brief-case was still on the table. The metal fastener had a hole in it, quite small, round, dark. The

bullet must have pierced the metal before striking West; if it hadn't, he would have been killed. He was as self-possessed as ever, none the less.

Now David let her go and was looking at West.

'Did you know you were in danger?' West demanded.

'No,' answered David. 'Not here, certainly, but——'

'Give me a straight answer, sir, please.'

'I suspected there was danger, both to me and my wife, but I didn't expect it here,' David said very carefully.

Danger? thought Henrietta, what danger had he known about? *Danger*. One man was dead and another had narrowly missed death, because of what was in the briefcase. What was the danger? Why hadn't David told her?

'What kind of danger?' demanded West.

'Of being murdered,' David answered calmly.

It was crazy, thought Henrietta, she couldn't be hearing properly, and yet she was. She moved to a chair and dropped into it.

'You *expected* it!' muttered the man with the gun. He moved towards West and David.

West seemed suddenly to become aware of his existence.

'Sir David, this is Lieutenant Thompson, who has been attached to the enquiry by the Miami Beach police.'

'Lieutenant,' David said, nodding.

'I wish I could say I was glad to meet you,' said Thompson. 'Who can be glad about this?'

'When were you first aware of the danger?' asked West.

A shadow passed across David's face.

'Shortly after our marriage my wife became a very sick woman, Superintendent, and as is often the case with mental disorders, her love for me turned, almost over-

night, to a fanatical hatred. The writer of those anonymous letters took advantage of her sickness by fanning this hatred, until at last she made an attempt to murder me. I hushed this up—persuaded the family doctor to say nothing. After the police had been called in over the attempted suicide, I felt, perhaps misguidedly, that any more attention might make her insanity permanent. A useless precaution as it turned out. And shortly afterwards she went away to the nursing home.'

'So you were safe from any further attack, Sir David.' West sounded sceptical.

'Safe from any further attack my wife might have made, Superintendent, but what about the person who so exploited her sickness? And what about Yolande's safety? I had very good reason to believe that the person who wrote those letters wanted us *both* dead!'

'So you went to Miami to forget about it.' West sounded even more sceptical.

'No, Superintendent. I came to Miami to see the only person whom I believed might be able to help me find the person responsible.'

'And who did you think could help you?'

'My cousin, Chloe Renati,' David answered. 'She works here as a social hostess. In fact you can probably see her in the pool patio if you look out of the window.'

The grey-suited man moved to the window. Henrietta looked out, too.

There in the sunlit patio, with the huge pool dotted with people swimming or floating, with hundreds of people lying on the beaches and dozens of colourful umbrellas dotted about, was Chloe. It was impossible to mistake her in her pink candy-striped dress and big floppy hat. She was standing with her back to the pool, a group of people in swimsuits about her. Even from here, it was possible to see that she was talking gaily, waving her arms, and something she said caused a burst of

laughter; people surged away from her, while she threw back her head and roared with laughter.

'Why should your cousin be able to help you?' asked West.

David pursed his lips, then moved and put a hand on Henrietta's shoulders; she felt its warmth and knew that he meant to comfort her, almost, it seemed, to protect her.

'She might know the whereabouts of the person I suspect,' he said quietly. He gestured towards the briefcase. 'It's all in there; everything. I have been searching for several months to find out who was doing such harm to Yolande, who has worked on her mental weakness, who had taken advantage of her madness so that she longed to kill me. Everything is there, West, a copy of my will, of Yolande's, the result of all my enquiries. The only surviving members of the family who would benefit my death and Yolande's, are Chloe, her married daughter and the daughter's husband. Chloe I trust absolutely, absolutely,' repeated David firmly. 'But the daughter married a bit of a rogue, so I understand, and——' He broke off.

Henrietta, staring out of the window at Chloe and the group now much closer to her, heard West say:

'Have you talked to her about this?'

'No. I wanted the documents first.'

'Yet you left them behind?' West's voice was disbelieving. 'An issue of such importance? When *are* you going to tell the truth, Sir David?'

It was almost impossible to believe that he would actually call David a liar, thought Henrietta, yet he had. Lieutenant Thompson turned from the window. There were mutterings which sounded like protests in the hall but no interruption.

'I left them behind deliberately,' David said. 'That is the truth.'

'And why should you do that, sir?' West sounded even more sceptical.

'To bring Henrietta—Miss Lyle—out here,' David said with quiet emphasis. 'I wanted to spend some time with her outside the atmosphere of my work. I knew that nothing would make her come unless it was really important. And I knew that I couldn't pretend something was important if it wasn't—I couldn't deceive her, it would have spoiled everything. So I had to have a genuine reason for needing her—apart, of course, from the fact that I love her. *That's* not a crime, is it, Superintendent?'

Henrietta thought, almost in anguish: 'I made him do this, I was no help at all.' She could not look away from David. He smiled at her in a strange, haunted way, then turned back to West.

'No, no crime, sir, but——' West paused, went to the window, and looked down at the patio. Then suddenly he swung round.

'If Mrs. Renati does know anything, then she might be in danger, too. How soon can you get her up here, Ivor?'

'My God!' breathed Thompson. 'I'll go get her, right now.'

# 19

## THE TELEPHONE CALL

WEST was alone with Marshall and the girl.

Policemen, photographers and newspapermen were at the door, as Thompson strode towards the elevators, but no one tried to get in to the room. West could not keep his gaze off the hostess by the pool. She was laughing again but she could be attacked as easily as Yolande had been attacked.

David and Henrietta, touched by the same tension, were also staring down.

Making a conscious effort, West made himself turn away from the window. Without a word he picked up the brief-case again, and took out the package. Slitting it open with his thumb, he drew out three envelopes, each marked 'Family'. Marshall's explanation was just plausible, he thought, but he could well have lied.

The first envelope contained reports from the Minerva Inquiry Agency—a reputable firm, Roger knew—on their endeavours to trace all surviving members of the Marshall family. Skimming swiftly through them, he found as Marshall had said, that there appeared to be only Chloe and her daughter, who, it seemed, had vanished five years earlier. In the second envelope was a copy of Marshall's will, and, attached to it, a copy of Lady Marshall's.

Still holding the documents in his hand, West walked back to the window.

Everything was going on in the same way down in the patio. At one end of the pool five youths were standing as

if ready to dive in. By the side a man was standing with a starter's pistol in his hand.

*Pistol!*

'My God,' thought West, 'he's pointing at Chloe Renati!'

'Look out!' he bellowed.

The next instant the starter pointed the gun into the air and fired. There was the crack of the shot, a puff of smoke, and the five youths dived into the pool. Almost at once, Lieutenant Thompson appeared with two of his men. Obviously he called out to the hostess, who turned to look at him. Even from this distance, Roger could see the sudden consternation on her face.

The next moment, she turned and ran.

And as she did so, scattering spectators right and left, the telephone bell rang.

Henrietta, David, Roger, remained motionless at the window; and the bell kept ringing.

Chloe Renati reached a doorway of the hotel building; she was still clearly visible to Roger from his vantage point at the window, but not to the police below, he thought; the crowd will hide her.

'Shall I answer that?' called a man from outside the bedroom door.

'No, I'll get it,' Roger called back tautly. The police had broken through the crowd and were now at the door where Chloe had disappeared; perhaps Thompson could see more than he thought. He stepped to the telephone, which was at the bedside table, and lifted the receiver. 'This is Sir David Marshall's room.' It would be for Marshall, of course, and——

'Is Superintendent West with you?' the operator asked.

'This is West speaking.'

'There is a telephone call for you from London, England, sir. Will you take it?'

'Yes, I will.'

'Hold on,' the operator told him.

There was a moment of silence, and Marshall and the girl turned away from the window. Marshall's arm was round Henrietta Lyle's shoulders.

Then voices sounded on the telephone, followed by one which West recognised.

'That you, West?' It was Coppell.

'West speaking, sir.'

'I've been having a hell of a job to get you,' growled Coppell. 'I've had a call from Milan. Somehow or other Ward got wind that we wanted to have a talk with him, and by the time Sloan got there he'd left.'

'H'mm. Looks a bit odd, doesn't it, sir?' West frowned.

'You'll think it odder still when I tell you where he's gone.' Coppell paused.

'Back to England, sir?' Roger hazarded. If Coppell had something important to say, why the devil didn't he say it, he thought irritably.

'No, West, not England.' Coppell sounded perturbed. 'He's on his way to Miami Beach.'

. . .

Miami Beach! The words rang in Roger's ears as he replaced the receiver. Ward was coming to Miami Beach! Was he coming after the Lyle girl? Or could it be . . .?

Roger sprang towards the door, but before he could reach it footsteps came stamping along the passage, and Ivor Thompson came in, looking hot and angry.

'Get her?' demanded Roger, but he knew the answer before Thompson spoke.

'We will. This place is like a maze on the shopping concourse, she dodged through one of the shops to the

street, and got away. But we'll pick her up soon. I've sent two men to her apartment and two are watching her car.'

'What about the airport?' demanded Roger.

'We've covered that, too—but she won't fly out.'

'I don't expect her to,' Roger said. 'But she may be meeting someone. Are there direct flights from Milan, Italy, to Miami Beach?'

'Only by charter planes, sir. Though there are plenty of direct flights from Frankfurt, which isn't so far from Milan. But where does Milan come in?'

Henrietta Lyle was turning round, now, tense with new interest.

'The murderer may not rely on his accomplices here to kill Sir David,' Roger said. 'He may come himself. Sir David—you know that your cousin, Chloe Renati, and her daughter and son-in-law are obvious suspects. Did you come here, not, as you said, to ask for Mrs. Renati's help, but to force the issue?'

Marshall shrugged his shoulders.

'You know so much, Superintendent, you might as well know that as well,' he said wearily. 'Yes.'

. . .

'He *has* been lying,' Henrietta thought wildly. 'He's lied all along, what else has he lied about?'

. . .

'You meant to force the issue once and for all?' West demanded.

'Yes, I did.'

'Have you told Mrs. Renati this?'

'Yes.'

'Has she admitted any part in the crimes?'

'No. She swears she doesn't know where her daughter is.'

'Do you believe her?'

'No.'

'Do *you* know where the daughter is?'

'No, I do not.'

'Sir David, did you expect to meet danger here?'

'Possibly.'

'Danger of murder?'

'Yes.'

'Then if you knew the situation was so dangerous, and if you have such a deep regard for Miss Lyle, *why* did you lure her to Miami?' West demanded. 'Do you really love her? Or did you want to get all possible suspects down here and try and set them one against the other. So that you could discover the truth?'

# 20

## THE TRUTH

HENRIETTA thought, appalled and yet believing: 'He suspected *me*! He still suspects me! Oh, God, where is it going to end?

. . .

'Did you, sir?' barked Roger. 'The *truth*, remember.'

Slowly and painfully Marshall answered, looking at Henrietta as he did so, not at West.

'Yes, that is exactly what I planned to do.'

'What chance did you think you had of succeeding?' demanded Roger. 'One against three or four or five, for all you knew.'

'There was no other way,' Marshall said.

'You could have come to us.'

'I had no faith in you,' said Marshall. 'I didn't see how you could solve a problem partly centred here in Miami, and in any case I wanted no—publicity.'

'What chance do you think you had?'

'Have you opened all the envelopes?' asked Marshall.

'No. What does that matter?'

'In one there is a statement which I proposed to give to everyone here,' said Marshall. 'It shows whom I suspect, and why. A copy is with my bank in London, to be opened on my death. I typed this myself, no one else knows what is in it. I believed that would frighten them all.'

'Even Miss Lyle?'

'If she was involved, yes.'

Henrietta gave a little sigh, hardly a sound at all. How could he possibly think she was involved? Marshall stretched out his hand towards her, but she did not stir to take it.

'Why did you suspect her?' Roger demanded.

Marshall hesitated, then moved so that he could look down on Henrietta, and spoke as if she were the only one in the room.

'I suspected you, Henrietta, partly because you were so often aloof. Sometimes it was as if you could hardly stand my presence—yet at other times you were warm and understanding and able to make me confide in you. I talked to you about everything except my deeper fears. I was absolutely sure of you whenever we were talking, but when you became aloof again—when you pushed me away, as you so often did—I wondered whether you were simply playing cat and mouse with me, almost seducing me to talk and tell you something you needed to know.'

Henrietta was looking at him as if she could not believe that such a suspicion was even possible. There was no colour at all in her cheeks.

'But most important of all,' went on Marshall, 'I suspected you because—because you were so friendly with Gerald Ward. No, Henrietta, not just because I was jealous—though God knows, I was—but because'—Marshall paused, looking intently into Henrietta's eyes—'because he was the man whom I believed sent those letters to Yolande—the man I believed to be plotting not only my death but hers. Hetty darling'—he bent towards her—'Ward may love you now, I couldn't understand the fellow if he didn't, but at first he was only using you to keep a track on my movements.'

'Ward,' thought Henrietta. 'Gerry Ward.' It was as if David were talking about someone she barely knew. A stranger.

'Then on Monday night I went to the nursing home,' Marshall continued. 'I wanted to see Dr. Courtways—and I saw Ward, in her car. I came away without letting them see me—and I knew then that it was possible that he was working in collusion with Dr. Courtways. When he came to fetch you the next evening I could have killed him. It wasn't only jealousy, Henrietta—it was fear that you were working with him.'

Lieutenant Thompson touched Roger's arm and drew him away.

'Roger.'

'Yes?'

'There's a flight from Frankfurt due in forty-five minutes.'

'Can we get there?'

'Surely.'

'Is Mrs. Renati at the airport?'

'She hasn't been seen yet. You coming?'

'Yes. Can you get that body out of here?'

'Don't worry, I've fixed another room for Sir David. Okay to leave them with a guard?'

'I shouldn't—there might be other hired assassins.'

'I guess so. I've talked to the manager, he'll see to them.' Thompson took Roger's arm. 'Let's go.' Outside in the passage he said to his men: 'When these two go to another room, stay with them at the door.'

'Sure,' a short, dark man said.

'Think you've got the truth at last?' Thompson went on, as he and West walked to the elevators.

'I think so,' Roger said.

An elevator opened almost at their bidding. In a moment they walked through the cool marble hall, stood for a second in the oven-heat of the driveway, stepped into an air-conditioned police car which drew up immediately, and were off along Collins towards the causeway. In twenty minutes they were at the airport; in

thirty the announcement came for the arrival of the flight from Frankfurt; and five minutes later they moved towards the bay where the aircraft would unload.

Standing near it was a group of people, waiting to meet passengers. Hovering unobtrusively on the fringe of the group was a big woman dressed in a pink candy-striped dress and wearing a floppy hat, the limp brim of which hid her forehead and the upper part of her face.

'*There she is*,' Thompson whispered. 'We going to wait to see if your man comes off?'

Roger nodded.

More people arrived to meet the aircraft, and now the group was joined by airline company officials and porters. Suddenly there was bustle, and tired-looking passengers began to disembark.

Roger counted thirty-one. More were coming but he was beginning to wonder if he were right, when Gerald Ward appeared. One arm was in a plaster and he carried only a light-weight brief-case. He glanced round quickly, but did not seem to recognise Chloe Renati. He started forward—and she moved quickly and barred his path.

He stopped and backed away. It was the alarm in his eyes which first warned Roger, and warned Thompson at the same moment. Thompson roared and jumped forward, Chloe Renati snatched a pistol from the folds of her dress, two policemen closed on Ward as he dodged, Thompson struck Chloe Renati's hand to one side, and the pistol clattered on the ground.

. . .

'That's right,' Chloe Renati said. 'He *is* my son-in-law, and I hate his guts. He's treated my daughter so badly he's nearly driven her crazy. Sure, he told her what he was planning, that he'd get rid of David and Yolande and then we'd all be in the money—but we never believed him. He's always been a small-time crook, always talked

big, but never been involved in anything but petty theft. And women, of course. Gee, how those women fell for him—he seemed to mesmerise them into doing anything he wanted. When I heard about poor Yolande—I never liked the woman, but that doesn't mean I want to see her murdered, *or* my daughter married to a murderer—I just saw red, I guess. Something seemed to crack. Why did you have to stop me?' she demanded bitterly. 'That man's so bad he oughtn't to be allowed to live.'

• • •

In Police Headquarters on Miami Beach, Gerald Ward said:

'She's a crazy woman. The whole family's crazy. You're not going to take any notice of her, surely.'

'Not much. I'd rather rely on the testimony of Dr. Courtways,' bluffed Roger.

Ward started. 'Damn the woman. Why couldn't she keep her mouth shut! I told her——' He broke off. But he had said enough to confirm Marshall's suspicions, and Roger now knew that it would only be a matter of time before the case against both him and Dr. Courtways was proved.

• • •

'I'm going back to England tonight,' Roger told Marshall later. 'There's no reason at all why you and Miss Lyle shouldn't stay here if you wish. I may have to ask you to fly back to help with enquiries, but I won't, if it's avoidable.'

'You're very good,' said Marshall. 'Just one question, Superintendent. Was my cousin a party to the plot?'

'She wasn't, sir,' Roger said. 'Like you, sir, she had a single-minded intention of settling her own debts. Ward

had treated her daughter so badly that she could think only of killing him.'

'If I hadn't come to Miami, do you think this would have been cleared up so soon?' asked Marshall.

'Very possibly, sir,' said Roger. 'And possibly without bloodshed out here. The two who attacked you and came for the brief-case were paid by Mrs. Renati, who swears that she had no thought of violence; they were simply to get the brief-case and find out what was in it. You had told her the papers were coming, hadn't you?'

Marshall nodded. 'Yes, I had. But I still think this was the quickest way to resolve the issue. All the same, Superintendent,' he added, 'I'm very grateful to you for coming out after me. What made you realise that something was going on?'

'That quarrel between you and Ward was far too violent to be explained as a quarrel over Miss Lyle,' Roger reasoned. 'There was real hatred in that quarrel. If you had stayed in England I would have questioned you again about this, and I think you would have told me of your suspicions—and of the association between Ward and Dr. Courtways. It could have been solved, sir—though not, I'm afraid, in time to have saved your wife.' Roger held out his hand. 'And now, sir,' he added. 'I hope you and Miss Lyle will take the opportunity to spend a few days in the sun. We don't get much of it at home.'

'I'm sure we will,' said Henrietta Lyle. 'I *know* we will.'

. . .

Three days later she lay beneath an umbrella, very warm, very content, oblivious of the patio noises going on about her. Opening her eyes, she saw David. He was wearing shorts, a loose shirt, and sandals, and was

already more sunburned than she.

'Are you going to have any lunch today?' he asked.

'I don't know,' she said lazily. 'Must I?'

'Yes,' he said. 'A walk on the promenade and then we'll go to the coffee shop.' He put a hand on her shoulder. 'I've had a cable from West.'

Henrietta caught her breath.

'Good or bad?'

'It *was* Dr. Courtways who killed Yolande. She and Ward have made a joint statement. The plot was to kill Yolande first and then kill me and make it look like suicide. And if things went wrong over Yolande's death, then you and I were to be the obvious suspects.' He slipped an arm round her shoulders. 'But it's all over now, darling.'

'David,' she whispered.

'Yes?'

'I do love you.'

'I won't ever doubt that again,' he promised.

Book Two

# MURDER, LONDON-AUSTRALIA

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# 1

# Old Friend?

'WHERE'S HE FROM?' asked Roger West.

'He's an Australian,' Kebble answered.

'Australia's a big place. What part does he come from?'

In a way, the question was cruel. Kebble's blue eyes clouded, his lips tightened, for a moment he made Roger think he was going to snap back a retort. That would be a pity. It was late afternoon, it had been a busy day, Kebble was pleased with himself – he was too often, that was his chief weakness – and it was a bad time to have to discipline a sergeant in the Criminal Investigation Department.

'Anything else you need to know about him?' Kebble's question fell just short of being sarcastic.

Roger, who didn't know the sergeant well, now tested him for both good humour and a sense of humour.

'Everything!' He grinned 'Age, appearance, colour of eyes, accent if any, general appearance such as breadline or in the prosperity stakes You know. The lot.'

Kebble was almost laughing by the time the recital was over – a good sign.

'I won't be long,' he promised, and walked out of the office.

Roger pushed his chair back and stood up. He was a big, powerful man, good looking enough to have been called 'Handsome' in his early days at the Yard, and the nickname had stuck Now his wavy blond hair was streaked with grey, but the overall impression was fair and youthful: He moved with a positive, almost aggressive briskness, and often talked in the same way.

He had risen from the ranks to very near the top.

This was a small room but a room more suitable to a Chief Superintendent of the CID might have more space, but would not command a view over the Thames Embankment as this did.

There were other advantages to a small room; somehow it made formality more difficult.

Kebble was today's stand-in for Cope, the Chief Inspector who usually shared the office It was a pity about Cope. He was ill, seriously ill, and the hospital reports weren't good He would probably get just well enough to retire early on a pension smaller than he really needed; bad luck, at fifty-one.

Kebble was thirty-two. He had been transferred from one of the divisions on the perimeter of the Metropolitan Police District, one of the superior residential areas. According to his record, he was a bright boy. To reach the top at the Yard one had to have a lot of luck as well as intelligence and skill, however, memory played a more important part than most realized, too. Kebble was certainly having the luck; three men off duty, through sickness, one by accident, two on all day court work, so Detective Sergeant Kebble was sitting-in as chief assistant to one of the Yard's senior officers.

Roger picked up the photograph of a girl and carried it to the window. She was pretty, even in death It was a good thing the picture did not show her neck.

What turned men into stranglers?

Who was this girl?

It was a puzzle, but not yet a worrying one; yesterday morning she had been found in the back room of a cheap boarding-house, choked to death. Roger West, who had seen her in the morgue, could picture the dark bruises on her neck He hadn't the pathologist's final report yet, but death by strangulation seemed a safe bet.

The morning newspapers had published this picture, with the caption:

'DO YOU KNOW THIS GIRL?'

If so, please communicate with New Scotland Yard, Whitehall 1212, or with your nearest police station.

The man who Kebble felt sure was Australian was not the first who claimed to know her, but none of the many others who had responded had really been able to help According to them she had seventeen different names and came from a dozen different parts of England.

There was a tap at the door.

'Come in.'

Roger turned his head as Kebble entered. There was something sinewy about him, about his rather long neck with its prominent Adam's apple, and bony wrists. His eyes were as alert as a bird's. In fact, he looked vaguely like a turkey.

'What else do we know now?' Roger inquired.

'The man's name is Benjamin Limm – L-I-double M – he comes from a place called Cowra in New South Wales,' deposed Kebble. 'He is a sheep farmer, aged about thirty-five, widower, five-eleven, lean, hardy-looking, grey-eyed, and fair-haired.'

Kebble was poker-faced when he stopped.

Roger called it a day as far as ribbing sergeants was concerned.

'Thanks. Do you think he knows our girl?'

'He says he's positive. He travelled from Australia on a cargo ship with her, and there were only nine passengers. He says this girl is Denise Morrison, who was travelling with her sister, Doreen. He doesn't seem to have any doubts at all.'

'How long ago was this?' Roger asked.

'Four weeks since they landed at Southampton, ten since they left Melbourne,' answered Kebble.

'I'll see this chap,' Roger said. 'I'll ask him the stock questions, too, including those you've asked. Take everything down.'

Kebble nodded.

'Go get him,' Roger said.

As Kebble stalked out of the office Roger studied that picture again How old was she? Twenty-two? Twenty-three? No more, anyhow. Dark-haired, a little too thin except at the breast, where she was heavy, *had been heavy*, he corrected himself. He felt uneasy, and that was not a good sign. Thirty years at the Yard – well, nearly thirty – gave one a kind of prescience which the Press liked to call a sixth sense. Every now and again it made itself felt, as it did now, and as it had since the investigation into this crime began. Until this moment he had not allowed himself to admit it, but now the feeling was too strong to be ignored.

Denise Morrison, who had a sister —

There was a brisk, almost peremptory tap at the door, and Kebble appeared.

'Shall I bring Mr Limm in, sir?'

'Please.'

Kebble's description had been good, but missed one important factor: vitality. Limm came striding in, a lean, rangy man with a glint of impatience in his eyes. He was good looking in a lean, long-jawed way, the kind who would probably attract youngish women.

Roger, standing at his desk, held out a hand.

'Mr Limm, I'm glad to see you. Thank you for taking the trouble to come to us about this bad business.'

Limm's handshake was quick, his hand cool.

'Bad business?' he echoed. 'How bad?'

'Don't you know?'

'No, Superintendent, I don't. I saw that photograph in a newspaper, and I came to say I knew Denise Morrison. Is she —' He broke off.

Roger said, quietly: 'She's dead, Mr Limm.'

Limm echoed: '*Dead.*' All the vitality seemed to be drained out of him. '*Dead?*' he repeated, making it a question as if his reason rejected the truth. 'Oh, no.'

'I'm afraid it's true. Push up a chair for Mr Limm, Sergeant.'

Kebble was at hand with an upright chair. Limm dropped into it. The glint of impatience had gone, only shock revealed itself in his eyes and his body. He sat staring at Roger.

'How well did you know her?' Roger asked.

'Er – not so well,' Limm answered. Then he squared his shoulders and his voice strengthened. 'As well as you get to know a fellow passenger on a six weeks sea trip. I suppose that's knowing her well.' He hesitated, as if there was something he wanted to say but either couldn't get it out or didn't know how to put it. 'Poor kid. Dead. She was so —'

He raised his hands and let them drop on to his knees.

'Full of life,' he finished. 'Absolutely full of life. She – how did she die?'

'We think she was murdered,' Roger said very clearly.

Limm caught his breath, formed the word 'no' again but did

not utter it Over at his desk now, Kebble was busy with his notes. Outside, traffic seemed very close to the open windows, the occasional roar of an engine changing gear drowned all sounds in this office.

'Mr Limm, did you know Denise Morrison before you joined the ship?'

'No,' Limm said. 'No, I didn't.'

'Are you sure her name was Denise Morrison?'

After a pause, Limm said flatly: 'Yes, I'm sure.' He squared his shoulders, and some life seemed to seep back into him. 'I saw her passport. She was on the passenger list, too.'

'Do you know where she came from? And what she did?'

'A town called Dandenong, not far from Melbourne,' Limm answered. 'She worked in a dress shop, did some modelling, and the buying. She went to the Melbourne and Sydney houses every season to stock up. Doreen was secretary to a big garage. They'd been saving up for years for this trip.' Limm's tone was husky, as if his memory of the dead girl was hurting him. He became suddenly aggressive. 'Have you any reason to think she didn't tell the truth or gave a false name?'

'I'm trying to make sure of her identity,' Roger said mildly.

'You can be sure all right,' Limm said gruffly. 'If I wasn't certain I wouldn't say so.'

'You should certainly know a girl who's been a fellow passenger for six weeks,' Roger agreed. 'But that isn't legal evidence, of course. Identification from a photograph never satisfies a coroner.'

'Coroner?'

'There has to be an inquest, and I'm afraid we'll need your testimony, unless we can find someone else who knew her better,' Roger explained. 'The inquest isn't likely to be delayed very long. Can you find time?'

Limm said with a growl in his voice: 'If I have to, I have to. What are you really telling me, Superintendent?'

'I would like you to see the body.'

Limm's lips were set very tightly until he asked in a clipped tone: 'Why me?'

'We haven't yet found anyone else who knows her.'

'What about her sister?'

'We've heard nothing from any sister.'

'Does she know —' Limm began, only to break off as if in astonishment. 'You mean you don't know where Doreen is?'

'We didn't even know she existed.' Roger stood up and moved slowly towards the window. 'The body – Denise – was found yesterday morning by the landlady of a boarding-house in South Kensington She had registered as Mrs Brown – was she married?' As he flashed that question, Roger spun round.

'Not – not as far as I know.'

'Was she engaged?'

'Not as far as I know,' Limm repeated. 'Superintendent, just tell me the whole story, will you? Don't jump about so much – I want to understand the situation properly'

Kebble glanced up at Roger, with a near grin.

'I can't tell you the whole story because I don't know it,' Roger replied 'But I'll tell you what we do know. She had given her name as Mrs Brown. She said she was expecting her husband to arrive later The landlady heard her go out about nine o'clock on the night of her death. She came back after midnight with a man whom no one saw, as far as we yet know No one heard the man leave At ten o'clock in the morning the landlady went to see if the young woman wanted anything. She was lying on her back, in her nightdress, dead.'

Limm was twisting round in his chair and watching Roger closely; he didn't speak.

'That is all and everything we know about the girl you call Denise Morrison and who called herself Brown. She may have been really married for all we know. She wore a brass wedding ring.'

'*Brass?*'

Roger moved to his desk and picked up a small plastic bag, tied at the neck, and labelled. Inside was a ring which looked as if it could have been made of gold for the plastic dulled the brashness of the brass.

'Except for her clothes, everything else had been taken away.'

'*Every*thing?'

'Handbag, money – if she had any – make-up, the lot. She had a new dacron-and-wool suit, made by the tens of thousands, new shoes, new stockings. Her girdle and brassière were

old – our experts here haven't yet identified the place of origin or manufacture. There's our problem, Mr Limm – to find a man we believe to be a murderer, and to find out why this young woman was murdered.' He spun round. 'Did you ever get the impression that she was frightened of anything?'

'Frightened?' echoed Limm. 'That girl didn't know the meaning of fear. She and her sister had saved every penny they could for this trip. They were going to work where they could, hitch-hike through England and then the Continent She had so much courage it almost scared me.' He stood up. 'If anything frightened her, it was something that happened after she reached England. I'll stake my reputation on that.'

'Did she tell you who she was going to see in England?'

'No,' Limm answered. 'I took it for granted she didn't know anyone. Three years ago her mother died – the father had been dead for a long time. They had no relatives in Australia, and as far as they knew none in England ' Limm began to walk about the room. 'This is the most awful thing I've ever heard of.' He stopped in front of Roger. 'Her sister – that's the part I can't believe Doreen worshipped Denise, she was like a watchdog. She was the practical one, held the money, carried out the plans, Denise made the plans, then left everything to her sister. Denise was the good-looker, too, but Doreen had the brains. Wherever Denise was, Doreen wouldn't be far behind. Believe me, you've got to find Doreen.'

'Have you a photograph of her?' Roger asked.

Kebble's sniff seemed to reject this question as absurd.

Limm put his hand to his pocket, took out a wallet, thumbed through it, and stopped at some snapshots. He took these out; there were seven or eight, all quite small.

'It's not much good but it's all I've got,' he said. 'One of the passengers took it and sent me a copy.'

There were nine people in the photograph, including Limm. One was undoubtedly the dead girl; another, smaller girl stood next to her, a young couple and an elderly couple, and one man in officer's uniform. Roger went to his desk and picked up a magnifying glass. It was a good picture and the faces would enlarge well.

'What can you tell me about the other passengers?' Roger asked.

Limm hesitated.

'There was Doreen, of course. Then there were the Donellis, an elderly couple going overseas for the first time since they emigrated about thirty years ago. They own some cafés in Adelaide. Kept themselves to themselves. Then there were Jack and Jill Parrish, honeymooners although they never admitted it. He's a Queensland banana grower, she's English – she'd been out to see some relations at Surfer's Paradise.'

'Where's that?' asked Roger.

'It's a holiday hot-spot on the South Queensland coast – part of the Gold Coast, you must have heard of that.' Roger didn't say so, but he hadn't. 'There was Perce Sheldon, an insurance broker, he did the trip for his health.' Limm almost leered. 'He ate enough for two. Except for old Sam Hackett, that's the lot. Liveliest near-octogenarian I ever met, Sam was. Looked like a piece of twisted gum root after a forest fire. He said he'd made his money in pearls and mother-of-pearl before the trade collapsed up on the West Coast.'

Limm obviously knew his Australia.

'Very comprehensive – many thanks,' Roger said. 'May I borrow this photograph?'

'So long as you mean borrow.'

'My word on it.'

'I'll accept that.' Limm smiled almost freely for the first time since he had been told of Denise Morrison's death. 'Will you look for Doreen?'

'Her description will be put on general call before I go home tonight,' Roger promised.

'You're right,' Limm said. His grin appeared again but was short-lived. 'I don't understand them breaking up, and I don't understand why Doreen didn't get in touch with the police the minute she saw that photograph. It doesn't make sense.' He seemed to square his shoulders again. 'Didn't you say you wanted me to see Denise?'

Limm obviously steeled himself to show no emotion when the girl's face was uncovered in that chill, brightly lit morgue.

Roger watched intently from across the bench, Kebble by Limm's side.

Abruptly, Roger pulled the sheet down to the bare shoulders, to show the bruised neck. Limm's composure broke. He clenched his teeth and clenched his hands.

Someone had clenched strong hands round that girl's throat not very long ago.

'For God's sake find Doreen,' he said hoarsely.

Doreen Morrison was only about three miles away. She was asleep in a small, ill-furnished room, alone on a divan bed She breathed so softly that she hardly seemed to be breathing at all. Had her eyes been open, the pin-point pupils would have betrayed the fact that she had been drugged with morphine.

## 2

# Second Witness

LIMM HAD GONE from Roger West's office.

Kebble had finished his notes; he would type them or have them typed in the morning. It was now nearly six o'clock, but he did not give the impression that he was fidgeting to be off. He had not asked Roger's opinion, and so shown considerable restraint. Roger finished signing some letters, rang for a messenger, and, as the man went out with the post, looked across at Kebble.

'What did you make of Limm?'

Kebble looked up quickly.

'Can't see any reason for suspecting he knows more than he said.'

'Think he does?' asked Roger.

Kebble ventured: 'I thought you thought he did.'

'Not yet,' Roger said 'I simply think he might, on the principle that we can't rule anyone out.' He went on as if speaking to himself. 'We're not allowed to presume guilt so why should we presume innocence?' He hoped that didn't sound as

pretentious as it seemed to him. 'Now, we've a lot to do. Any special date tonight?'

'No, sir.'

'Good.' Roger stretched out for the telephone, speaking as he did so. 'Take that snapshot up to Photography, have enlargements done of all the faces, get the prints of the Morrison sisters sent round to all Divisions and Home Counties tonight.' Into the telephone he said: 'Get my wife, please.' He put the receiver down and went on to Kebble without a pause. 'Find out from the shipping company where the SS *Kookaburra* is now. If she's in London, check with the Port police and Thames Division – I'd like to see the captain and the crew. If she's not in London, find out where she is. Then get a full passenger list, with the English addresses of all passengers who landed at Southampton – any British port, for that matter.'

His telephone bell rang.

'Got all that?'

'I think so,' Kebble said.

Roger's hand hovered impatiently over the telephone. '*Think?*'

'Yes, I have.'

'Get things started, then come and see me again.' Roger lifted the telephone. 'West. . . Oh, put him through. . .' His tone changed but he was still brisk. 'Hallo, Scoop, is Mum out?'

Kebble, disappearing through the door, was looking round at him.

'Hi, Dad,' said Martin called-Scoop, Roger's elder son. 'Yes, she's gone over to Mrs Pollister's, to some cocktail party or other. She said she would be back by seven, though.'

'Tell her I may not be back until late,' Roger said. 'Had a good day?'

'Pretty good. I finished that painting of the newspaper boy. I think it's all right.'

'Try painting a millionaire,' said Roger. 'He'd be more likely to buy his portrait.'

'Never heard of art for art's sake?' asked Martin, with a hint of laughter in his voice.

'Try living on it,' retorted Roger. 'How's Fish?'

Martin chuckled. 'He's in a hell of a stew. He's got the inside

out of that old MG and can't find one of the pistons or something. He's sulphurous.'

'Don't make him feel any worse,' Roger cautioned.

'I won't get the chance. Dad —?'

'Yes?'

'What's on?'

'Bad men up to no good,' Roger said bluffly.

'Don't put me off. Is it that girl? I mean the one whose photograph was in the *Globe* this morning?'

It was always a delicate matter to know how much to tell his sons, and how much to discourage them in their natural curiosity, but there was no point in hedging over this.

'Yes,' Roger said simply.

'It's a damned shame.'

'That's putting it mildly.'

'I mean, a pretty girl like that.'

'Don't judge entirely from looks,' Roger said automatically. 'Scoop, I really must go. Don't forget to tell Mum.'

He rang off, and paused to look at Denise Morrison's photograph, trying to imagine how she would appear to a youth of twenty. 'A damned shame.' That summed up Scoop; his quick involvement in other people's affairs, and his ready sympathy despite an outward show of toughness. What would he say if he knew about the so far silent sister?

Roger put his son out of his mind, made some notes on a pad, then lifted the telephone.

'I'll be out of the office for five minutes,' he said.

'Very good, sir.'

Roger went along the nearer passage and up a flight of stairs, moving with controlled haste, a sign of tension, an indication of the vitality always in him; he could never get anywhere or do any job quickly enough for his own liking. He reached a sergeants' room, the one where Kebble should be, by rights. A man was talking on the telephone. As Roger drew nearer, he said:

'Don't blame me, Kitty, blame his devotion to duty . All right, all right! Blame my new Boss, the great Handsome West. . . . Yes, West. . . . Kitty,' the man went on in almost horrified tones, 'that's as near sacrilege as you can get about anyone at Scotland Yard ' He laughed. 'Stay in and be good for once.'

He rang off.

Roger, who wanted to send a sergeant to check on Benjamin Limm, walked past the partly open door without glancing in. So Kebble had lied about not having a date, a strong point in his favour. Roger soon turned back, to find two sergeants sitting on stools in front of old-fashioned high desks, they slid off almost to attention.

'Who's not busy?' Roger inquired, amiably.

One of the men, a short, almost dapper man named Scott, gave a one-sided smile.

'I've nothing that can't wait, sir.'

'Good. Here's all I can tell you about the man Limm, who came to see me just now.' Roger handed over some of the notes. 'Check the address he gave, how long he's been there, get anything you can about him – all very discreetly Understood?'

'Yes, sir!'

'Call me as soon as you can,' Roger said. 'I'll be in my office until eight o'clock at least If I've gone by the time you've a report to make, call me at my house.'

'I'll do that,' promised Scott.

Roger nodded and went out As he neared his own office the telephone was ringing incessantly, yet he had told the operator that he would be out, and operators seldom slipped up. With his natural kind of restrained haste, he opened the door, stretched across, and picked up the telephone.

'Yes?'

'Oh, Mr West, I know you said you'd be out, but I've a man on the line who says he has to catch a plane in five minutes but wants a word with the officer in charge of the girl's photograph case.'

'Thanks,' Roger said. 'I'll talk to him.'

There was hardly a pause before the man came on the line. The first obvious thing was that his voice resembled Limm's, in the sense that the pronunciation of vowels was different from normal English. Over the telephone it sounded loud and harsh, not at all like Limm's.

'Are you handling the inquiry about the girl whose photo is in the *Globe*?'

It had been in all the newspapers except *The Times*; it was surprising how often the *Globe* was mentioned.

'I can tell you who she is,' the man stated.

'Are you sure?'

'My word, yes. They don't come like Denise Morrison very often. I sailed from Australia on the same ship, the SS *Kookaburra*. Yes, sir, I'm sure. She was with her sister, Doreen. Superintendent, she's not in any trouble, is she?'

'I'm afraid she is,' Roger said quietly.

'That's bad I wish I hadn't got to go, but I had just three months sick leave, and if I'm not home by Wednesday *I'll* be in trouble. My name's Sheldon, Superintendent, Perce Sheldon. I'm from Adelaide in South Australia – insurance is my racket. Let me know if I can help, won't you?'

'Yes,' Roger said. 'What flight are you going on?'

'Flight 107 from London Airport,' said Sheldon. 'They're calling it right now. I hope Denise isn't in too much trouble. She was a beaut of a girl to have on board ship.'

He banged down his receiver.

Roger put his down almost as quickly, made several notes before hearing footsteps outside; Kebble had been a long time in Photography but he might have stopped somewhere else on the way. He was frowning as the door closed behind him with a snap, pushed harder than was necessary.

Roger finished his notes.

'What's the trouble?'

'Missed 'em by five minutes,' Kebble said gloomily.

'Who did you miss?'

'The shipping agents. There's only the caretaker in the office now. I spent too long researching on them,' Kebble went on disconsolately. His forehead sloped back a little, his jaw almost fell away into his neck, yet gave no impression of weakness. 'I thought if I found out the manager's name it would help, but —' His Adam's apple wobbled. 'It's Smith '

'Get after him first thing in the morning,' Roger said. 'We've just had confirmation that the girl was on the SS *Kookaburra*, and that her name is Morrison. I've sent Scott to check on Limm What did Photography say?'

'The photo will be ready for the teleprinter by eight-thirty.'

'No problems?'

'Old George grumbled about having to treat it as urgent,' Kebble said. He was standing straight in front of Roger. '*Is* it so urgent, sir?'

Roger sat back, one hand in his trouser pocket.

'It could be. If it is, we've made a good start and we can really get moving in the morning. If it isn't – no harm's done.' He wondered about the missed date with Kitty, what Kitty was like, what the missing Doreen was like. The photograph had been a poor guide, but the enlargement should help. The missing sister worried him, and somehow got under his skin.

'I see,' Kebble said. 'So that's how you do it?'

Roger only half heard. 'Eh?'

'It doesn't matter,' Kebble said hurriedly.

Roger forced himself to recall the words, and with a half smile he asked: 'So that's how I do what?'

Kebble flushed, and it made him look more than ever like a gobbler.

'I don't want to seem impertinent, sir.'

'Did you mean to be?'

'Of course not.'

'Then let's have it.'

Kebble gave a rather high pitched laugh.

'You're something of a legend to us younger men, Superintendent. Always pulling off the impossible. If you get moving as quickly as you have over this it means you've a yard start on anyone else – it's like perpetual motion That's all I meant, sir.'

'That's enough butter,' Roger said, not ill-pleased 'Detection is like genius, the infinite capacity for taking pains. It couldn't be simpler.' After a brief pause, he went on: 'Telephone London Airport and find out if a Perce or Percival Sheldon was on Flight 107 for Australia, will you?'

Sheldon was a tall man, in his fifties, running to fat. His luggage was on board the aircraft except for a brief-case and a raincoat, which he carried He looked hot, and his forehead was beaded with perspiration. His collar was a little too large for him, and the knot of his tie was askew. He stepped out of the telephone booth, jammed his paunch against the handle, then

eased himself free; he was too used to such inconveniences to take any notice.

The disembodied voice came over the loudspeaker.

'This is the last call for passengers for Flight 107. Will Mrs Georgina Thomas and Mr Percival Sheldon please report at the gangway immediately.'

A little woman with a mass of artificial flowers for a hat began to scamper across the lounge, big shiny handbag banging against her knees, umbrella poking out from beneath her arm, a look of dismay on her face. Sheldon thought: 'That's Georgina Thomas. I wonder how far she's going.' He quickened his pace, something he never liked doing because he became out of breath so easily. He saw a man reading the *Globe*, and on the page turned towards him was the photograph of Denise Morrison.

'Hope she's all right.' He had a habit of talking to himself. 'Hope I did the right thing. I —'

He broke off, missed his step and went staggering forward. He was so out of control that he banged bodily into a young girl, and sent her flying, too. A youth by her side cried:

'What the hell do you think you're doing?'

Sheldon didn't hear. He was pitching forward on to the thick red carpet. Pain shot through his chest as if a knife had been driven between his ribs. The pain was so great he could not cry out, he could not breathe, he could do nothing but let his flabby body go where it would.

'Careful!' a man called out.

'He's sick,' a woman said in a clear American accent.

'Mind away there!'

Sheldon finally lost his balance. As he fell, his right arm flopped against an upright ash-tray, sending it clattering, and cigarette butts and ash flying. He hit the floor with a heavy thump, quivered, and lay still. His lips were parted and he was breathing through them – just breathing. His eyes were half closed, glazed, lifeless.

'Get a doctor,' a man called urgently.

'Doctor?'

'Fetch a doctor.'

'*Doctor!*'

An official of the airport came up, with the positive manner

of a person who was determined to stop all this fuss. A thickset man among the gathering crowd moved forward and announced:

'I'm a doctor.'

They were the last words heard by dying Perce Sheldon. They seemed to bring a crystal clear message of hope, but as the doctor bent over him another spasm of agonizing pain seemed to split his chest in two, his head in two, finally cleaved his whole body.

## 3

# Alarm

ROGER TURNED OVER the page of a preliminary report on the Denise Morrison case, already half wishing that he had not decided to stay late. There had seemed so much to do, but most of it would have to wait until morning; nothing yet justified summoning the shipping company manager back to his office. Kebble was waiting for the airport call to come through. Roger ran a finger down the list of people who had 'identified' the girl It was odd that no one who really knew her had got in touch with the police until late afternoon – the *Globe* was a morning paper It was odd, too, that no one else had recognized her; girls from Australia weren't rarities here, usually they were quick to meet and make friends with others from their home country. There were private hotels and boarding-houses kept by Australians whose boarders came almost exclusively from down under. It was difficult to believe that the girl had made no friends in London. In any case, there was the sister.

Kebble's telephone rang. He picked it up quickly but without fuss.

'Kebble. . . . Yes, at once, please. . . Yes.' There was a pause. Roger did not look up, but was intent on the younger officer. 'I want to make an inquiry about a passenger flight. . . . Yes, it is an official inquiry. . . . Flight 107, for Australia. . . . Yes. Will

you tell me whether a Mr Perce Sheldon was among the passengers?'

So far it was all calm, competent, done without fuss, and with the manner of a man who knew exactly what he wanted and how to do it. Next moment his voice changed so ludicrously that Roger actually jumped.

'*What?*'

Kebble looked as if he was being told that the plane had crashed, he was so appalled.

'*Are you sure?*'

There was another pause, before he said in a more normal voice:

'Dead for how long?'

Roger sprang up from his chair.

'I see,' Kebble said. 'Put me on to the Airport Police Office, please I'll hold on' He covered the mouthpiece with his free hand 'Sheldon died at the airport.' He still sounded shocked.

'How?'

'The operator says he just dropped dead.'

Roger could not stop himself from exclaiming: '*Dropped* dead?'

'Incredible, isn't it?'

Roger didn't speak.

'Must be a coincidence,' went on Kebble.

'Could be,' Roger conceded, doubtfully. 'When the police come on, ask for Inspector Sandys.'

'Will you talk to him?'

'Just get the details and tell him you and I are on the way to see him. Oh – find out if the body's been moved If it hasn't, ask him to keep it there.'

'That'll cause a stink at —' Kebble began, then raised the mouthpiece. 'Hallo? . . . I'm Detective Sergeant Kebble speaking for Superintendent West of Scotland Yard. . . . Is Inspector Sandys there, please? . . . Please.'

Roger was looking through the contents of his bag, which was always ready for an emergency. Everything was there – if he used any of the contents on one job he always made a reminder note to make sure he didn't go off without it. He tucked the

magnifying glass into its place, closed the box, and turned round.

Kebble was saying: '. . . should be there in forty minutes.' He rang off. 'The body's at the Airport Hospital.'

'Should have expected that,' Roger said. 'What did Sandys have to say? All het up at the suggestion of foul play, I suppose.'

'He – er – did give me that impression,' Kebble admitted. He stood up as Roger rounded the desk.

'We'll take my car,' Roger said. 'Go and bring it round to the foot of the steps. I'm going to put some steam into Photography.'

He was out of the room ahead of Kebble, and hurried to the lift with that brisk, thrusting manner which characterized him; a kind of disciplined haste which had become second nature; 'perpetual motion', Kebble had said, and the recollection amused him. There wasn't much to be amused at in this case, and it seemed as if his premonition of trouble had been justified. He wondered whether the years of experience did give a Yard man a kind of prescience.

The lift was at this floor. Roger went up two, then hurried along to Photography. This was not the most spacious department at the Yard, but it remained one of the most vital.

Superintendent George Cole, a pale-faced, flabby man with a big double chin, was at a big drawing-desk, where a dozen wet prints were pinned out. He turned his head as Roger entered.

'Gaw,' he complained. 'I might've known it. Eight-thirty I said and I meant har-past eight.'

'George,' said Roger, 'it's urgent.'

'Never had a job of yours that wasn't, in your opinion.'

'Nice-looking girl, George, wasn't she?'

'That won't cut any ice. London's full of nice-looking girls and half of them come from Australia, if you can judge from Australia House.'

'She came over on the SS *Kookaburra*.'

'Nice little birdie,' said George; that was his brand of humour.

'One of the other passengers on the *Kookaburra* dropped dead at London Airport half an hour or so ago,' Roger declared.

Cole actually gasped, moistened his lips, and ejaculated:

'Gaw. Which one?'

'The man on the right of that snapshot How soon can we get all of those enlargements round to the Divisions?'

'Smell 'em out, don't you?' Cole said. 'Perishing marvel, you are. I'll see it's out by har-past seven.'

'George, you're a far better man than they say you are.' Roger slapped the plump back, threw 'Thanks,' over his shoulder and hurried out.

Kebble was downstairs, by Roger's black Rover.

'You drive,' Roger said.

Rush hour was over, so the Embankment wasn't busy. Kebble knew his London. He weaved and swerved until he reached the flyover beyond Knightsbridge, then put on speed. No one had cause to complain. They reached the main airport gates in thirty-one minutes and were pulling up outside the Airport Police office in thirty-five As Roger got out, a man at a window on the first floor looked out, and waved.

'I'll come down,' he called.

Half a minute later, Roger was saying:

'Sergeant Kebble, Chief Inspector Sandys. Sandy, I'll bet you haven't checked a thing.'

'That's where you're wrong,' retorted Sandys, with gloomy satisfaction. He was a comparatively short man with a brick red face, gingery hair going grey, brown eyes, bushy eyebrows, and a mass of freckles on face and hands 'I've checked what time he arrived, where he went, who he talked to, what he ate – but it's all a flicking waste of time Poor basket had a heart attack.'

'Who said so?'

'*I* say so.'

'Doctor confirmed it?'

'It's only a matter of time,' Sandys insisted.

'It will save us a lot of trouble if you're right,' Roger said. 'Where's the doctor now?'

'He's still with the corpse,' Sandys answered 'Wonder is you didn't bring your tame pathologist along with you as you're in such an almighty hurry.'

'Now would I do that until we had a medical opinion?' asked

Roger. They were walking towards the main airport building, past the customs bays, up the escalator. 'Did Sheldon speak to many people?'

'News-stand, snack-bar waitress, and one official. He'd got his main baggage on board.'

'Did he have anyone to see him off?'

'Not at the airport *or* the terminal.'

'How did he get here?'

'Airways bus.' Sandys took even greater satisfaction in having the answers off pat.

'Do you know if he spoke to any of the other passengers?'

'Couldn't ask 'em,' said Sandys. 'The plane took off on time without him. Could talk to the pilot by radio if you think it's that important.'

'I think it might be,' Roger said. 'Half an hour won't make any difference, though.'

'Don't tell me you're slowing down!' The prospect seemed to delight Sandys as he led the way up a flight of stairs and pointed to a spot which had been roped off – an area perhaps fifteen feet by twenty. 'That's where he fell,' Sandys declared with even great satisfaction.

'You must have had second sight,' Roger said.

'Just my natural thoroughness,' Sandys boasted. For the first time since they had met it seemed to Kebble that he wasn't trying to take a rise out of the Superintendent. 'Never do like these sudden deaths, Handsome. Ten per cent chance there's something queer, I always say.'

They reached the section which had been roped off with white cords supported by knee-high stands, used for keeping gangways separated; there was nothing sensational about it, nothing to attract attention. Only a young couple, looking diffident, were staring at it.

Sandys began to explain what had happened. The young couple seemed to take a deep interest. Kebble was tempted to move them on, but Roger West seemed oblivious.

'. . . he just toppled over,' Sandys said. 'Down he went, out like a light.'

The diffident young man, who had a receding chin and a

weak mouth, a chicken to Kebble's turkey, said: 'Excuse me.'

Sandys stared at him, his expression enough to frighten off even a youth who was not timid.

'This is official business.'

'I – er – yes, I can see that, but —'

'Cyril, it's not worth wasting any more time,' the girl interrupted. She was shorter than her skinny and meek-looking companion, stocky, dark-haired, with a fringe which made her round face slightly like that of a Japanese doll. 'Come on.'

'No, Sal, I can't.'

'Cyril, *please*.'

'If you can help us at all we'll be most grateful,' Roger said. 'Did you see the incident?'

'Incident!' snorted the girl. 'We saw the man die.'

'You're quite right, it was much more than an incident.'

Roger looked at her gravely. 'Did you see what happened before Mr Sheldon died?'

The girl didn't answer.

'Yes,' declared the weak-looking Cyril. 'We did And he didn't suddenly fall – he staggered at least twenty feet before he fell. He banged into my fiancée, that's why we took such notice of it. But the thing is —'

Sandys looked as if he could wish the young man a thousand miles away. Kebble was fascinated by the difference between his manner and that of West.

'Cyril, it might have been nothing. Please don't start a lot of rumours.'

'Is this something you saw or something you heard?' Roger asked the youth.

'Something we saw.'

'Both of you?'

'I'm not really sure,' the girl said.

'Sal, you know as well as I do that you saw what happened. You are the police, aren't you?' he asked Roger.

'Yes.' Roger slipped a card out of his breast pocket and showed it. 'This is Inspector Sandys of the Airport Police, and my assistant, Detective Sergeant Kebble. May I have your names?'

'I'm Cyril Gee,' the meek-looking young man introduced himself. 'My fiancée's Sarah Welling.'

'You both have my assurance that anything you say you saw will be treated in confidence,' Roger said. 'What was it, Mr Gee?'

'As a matter of fact, it was at the snack bar,' answered Gee, quite positively. 'The – er – the man who died had some fruit salad and ice-cream, and a cup of coffee. He was reading the newspaper, and suddenly saw something which interested him. A man who had been standing near by came up and jabbed something into him. I'm positive. He stood very close to the man who died, and banged against him. His hand was in his pocket but I saw a pin or a needle or something stick out of the pocket. The man who was eating ice-cream jumped and rubbed his 'rump,' but the other chap went off.'

Sandys exclaimed: 'Good God.'

Kebble felt a rush of excitement.

Roger looked straight at Sarah Welling, and asked: 'Did you also see that action, Miss Welling?'

'Yes,' she said miserably. 'It happened all right. The awful thing —'

She broke off.

'The awful thing,' said meek-mannered Cyril Gee, 'is that we didn't say anything about it to the fat man. We couldn't make up our minds what to do, it was such a surprising thing to happen. The man who used the needle or pin was gone so quickly. He was rather short and was soon lost in the crowd. And the dead man – Sheldon, did you say?'

'Yes.'

'Well, he gobbled down the rest of the ice-cream and dashed off,' went on Gee. 'Sal and I talked about it for a few minutes. We didn't know what to do.'

'The truth is, we dithered,' the girl put in bitterly.

'Who wouldn't?' asked Roger, with brisk reassurance. 'Would you recognize this little man again?'

'Oh yes,' asserted Gee.

'Yes,' answered Sarah Welling as firmly.

'Sandy,' Roger said to the Airport man, 'if there was a jab there'll be a puncture – which side, Mr Gee?'

'Right,' answered Gee.

'Thanks. See the doctor, Sandy, will you?'

'Right away.' Sandys hurried off.

'Mr Gee, your information might be invaluable,' Roger said. 'We've no positive reason to think that Mr Sheldon died from anything but natural causes, but in a case like this anything which seems inexplicable has to be examined closely. Will you fill in any details you can, and Detective Sergeant Kebble here will make notes. Are you in any great hurry?'

'We only came for a meal and to watch the aircraft take off,' Gee said 'We're not in any hurry at all, are we, Sal?'

'I suppose not,' the girl agreed resignedly.

'Find a quiet corner, have a drink on Scotland Yard, and tell Sergeant Kebble all you can,' Roger said. 'I'll see you again before you go.'

He nodded, and went off. Not far away in the now busy lounge were some telephone booths. He went into the nearest empty one, and dialled Whitehall 1212.

'Scotland Yard. Can I help you?'

'Give me the Information Room,' Roger said.

His voice seemed to put life into the operator.

'At once, sir!' That proved longer than Roger liked and he turned round Watching Kebble and the young couple he saw a short man who seemed very interested in them, and wondered if by any chance Sheldon had been in this very box.

'Mr West?' Information came at last.

'Get in touch with the City Police, and tell them we need the full passenger list with British addresses, of a ship called the SS *Kookaburra* which reached Southampton from Australia about four weeks ago,' Roger said. 'Better have the officers, too We need the information tonight. It's the Blue Flag line, and the office is in Throgmorton Street. The manager's name is Smith.'

'I've got all that,' the Information man said. 'Where shall I call you?'

'I'll be in soon,' Roger said. 'Don't let anyone stall you Two passengers from that ship are dead, one certainly and one possibly of violence. I'd hate anything to happen to the others.'

As he put down the receiver he suffered a moment of acute anxiety, almost alarm: for how did he know other passengers weren't dead already?

'Nonsense!' he said aloud, and pushed his way out of the telephone booth, angry with himself but with the shadows as of premonition hovering over him, and the face of the dead girl's sister clear in his mind's eye.

Doreen Morrison was still asleep, but she was breathing more loudly. Now and again she stirred; a movement shifted sheet and blanket and revealed one pale shoulder in the north light of the shabby room.

After a while, her eyes flickered, and opened, and stayed open as she stared blankly at the dingy ceiling.

## 4

# Pathologist's Report

NO SHADOWS WERE dispersed when Roger stepped into the small room at the airport hospital – really an elaborate first-aid post – where Perce Sheldon's body lay The body was on a high bed, covered from head to foot with a white sheet, big, bulky, a carcase of hopes and plans, and perhaps deep grief for someone who was half the world away.

On one side of the bed stood Sandys; on the other, a youthful, dark-haired man whose hair grew far back from a pale, shiny forehead. He had big eyes and a button nose, and had something of the look of a golliwog. Roger had met him two or three times, and knew him well enough to respect him both as a doctor and as a man of intelligence.

Sandys glanced round.

'About time,' he said gruffly.

'Hallo, Dr Mason,' Roger said.

'Good evening, Mr West.' Mason, on the nearer side to Roger,

moved a step and shook hands. 'I've just made myself very unpopular with Inspector Sandys.'

Roger's smile was set.

'Not natural causes?'

'Possibly not natural causes. The indications were an acute seizure, probably a coronary. Nothing a superficial examination can reveal suggests it. There is a small puncture in the right buttock but it is not conclusively a hypodermic needle puncture.'

'Are you able to suggest what caused death?'

'Not until after the autopsy. Do you want me to arrange that?'

Roger said quietly: 'Do you want to do it?'

'Not one little bit.'

'Then I'll get Whales to do it,' Roger said Dr Frederick Whales was the pathologist who had carried out the post mortem on Denise Morrison. 'All right with you, Sandy?'

'I'll have to get approval,' Sandys said. 'But it'll be okay. When do you want him?'

'As early as possible.'

'If I'm fixing that I can't give anything else priority.'

'What I'd like you to do as soon as practicable is find which officials were in the waiting-room at the same time as Sheldon. I'll have to use the newspapers for the general public.'

Roger's thoughts were running ahead of him. There was so much to do, and telling himself that everything got done eventually did not stop him from fretting because he could not do a dozen things at once. The country editions of the morning newspapers were already being printed but there was time to catch later editions. A request for more eyewitnesses who had seen Sheldon stagger and fall might do more harm than good. If these two deaths had been by the same hand, then the killer would be warned that the police were close on his heels.

'Better wait until I'm sure,' Roger said to himself. He went across to a quiet corner where young Cyril Gee, Sarah Welling, and Kebble were standing and talking. There were two glasses on a nearby table.

'How's it going?' asked Roger.

'I've a comprehensive statement signed by both Miss Welling

and Mr Gee,' Kebble said. 'They've given me their business as well as their home addresses. I think they have done all they possibly can tonight.'

Roger said: 'Then we needn't keep you a moment longer.' He shook hands. 'Very many thanks – and we won't worry you again unless we have to.'

'You'll have to, I'll bet,' Sarah said. She looked tired and unhappy.

'Come on, Sal,' Cyril Gee took her arm and led her away.

'He may look a nit but he's no fool,' Kebble said, almost to himself. 'How are we doing, sir?'

'The local medic has doubts about the cause of Sheldon's death, and Sandys is beginning to hate the sight of me.' Roger forced a smile. 'I'm going back to the Yard. You stay with Sandys. We want the most comprehensive picture we can of Sheldon's collapse. Humour Sandys, though.'

'It would need an angel to do that,' said Kebble. 'I won't upset him, sir. I'll report as soon as I've got the picture.'

Roger nodded, and went across to the police office. For a second time Sandys stopped him with a wave from the window. Soon, the airport policeman came hurrying out.

'Where d'you want the corpse?'

'Cannon Row,' Roger answered. 'I'll warn 'em it's on the way. Thanks, Sandy. Do me another favour, will you?'

'Can't think why I should, but I will if I can."

'Go easy on young Kebble. He's new to the Yard.'

'Young pup,' growled Sandys But he grinned.

Roger got into his car, drove through the tunnel to the main exit, and once on the open road, switched on his radio telephone. Information answered almost at once. Roger gave specific instructions for Cannon Row Police Station to prepare for Sheldon in their morgue, and went on:

'Check with City Police about the passenger list. Ask Dr Whales if he has his post mortem report on Denise Morrison ready, and also ask him to carry out the autopsy on Sheldon first thing in the morning.'

Finished, he tried to put the case out of his mind for half an hour. It was a fine starlit evening, there was comparatively

little traffic. The glow over central London was so bright that it tinged the night sky with a rainbow of pastel colours. Two youths in an open MG which roared past him reminded him of his two sons. He glanced at the dashboard clock. It was nearly eight-fifteen: there should be time to pop into his home, have a snack, enjoy half an hour with Janet, his wife, and the boys. He did not even need to make a detour; the quickest way to the Yard wast past the end of Bell Street, where he lived. The temptation was very strong.

His radio crackled. He picked the receiver up.

'West.'

'Information here, sir. I've just had a message from Dr Whales. He'll be in your office in twenty minutes.'

'Tell him I'll be there in good time,' Roger said. 'Any other messages?'

'None, sir.'

'Thanks.' Roger rang off.

Now he had another preoccupation; why should the pathologist be coming to see him? That wasn't usual, as late in the day as this, unless it was urgent. Thoughts of going home vanished from his mind. It wasn't until he was walking along to his office, feeling ravenously hungry, that he remembered what he had half planned to do. The office was in darkness. He switched on the light, rang for a messenger, and asked as soon as one came in:

'Get me sandwiches and coffee, will you – quick as you can.'

'Right away, sir,' the elderly messenger promised.

Roger sat at his desk. Several reports had come in about other cases, and there were twenty-seven more reports about the girl on the photograph; someone had put a note of that number on top of the pile. He thumbed through it quickly, anxiously, and in his heart he hoped for one from Doreen Morrison.

None was there.

There was nothing from anyone who knew her as Denise Morrison, either, so it was a reasonable bet that none of these reports was really about the dead girl He made sure no one had known her as Brown, the name she had used at the boarding-house, then closed the file.

He heard footsteps in the passage, and in spite of his mood,

he grinned. No one could ever mistake Dr Frederick Whales's footsteps He plonked each foot down, rather as if he were a big fish learning to walk. He was a big heavy man, too, and his waddle of a walk was due entirely to his flat feet.

The door was ajar.

'Hallo, Handsome,' Whales greeted him. He looked pale and tired, and also looked as if he had slept in his clothes, he was notorious for his untidiness 'Glad you aren't comfortably settled in the bosom of your family ' He sat in the larger of two armchairs. 'How about a whisky and soda?'

'When you've told me what this is all about,' Roger said.

'One of these days when you want a job done in a hurry I'll refuse,' Whales said, as Roger bent down by the side of his desk, opened a cupboard and took out whisky, soda-water, and two glasses. 'She wasn't strangled.'

Roger's fingers tightened on the neck of the whisky bottle.

'That is to say she didn't die of strangulation,' Whales went on. 'Someone exerted a lot of pressure on her neck after death. Don't ask me why. The fact remains that she was poisoned. Don't ask me whether the poison was self-administered or not. I don't know.'

Roger began to pour out the whisky.

'What killed her?' he asked.

'Digitalis.'

'Induced heart failure?'

'Yes.'

'How was the digitalis administered?'

'By injection, I presume.'

Roger squirted soda-water into the glass which had more whisky and handed it to the doctor.

'Can't you be sure?'

'Good luck.' Whales drank as if he were parched '*Ahhhh!* Be sure of what?'

'How the poison was administered.'

'Not absolutely. Injection is the most likely. Have known it taken orally.'

'Any in the stomach?'

'No.'

'Isn't that conclusive?'

'No,' Whales said, 'and you know it. It can be absorbed and all traces lost. But there's no doubt about the cause – no doubt at all. Want all the clinical details?' He finished his drink.

'No. Have the other half,' Roger said.

'Don't mind if I do, but what are you after?'

'A quick job on another possible victim of poisoning by digitalis.'

Whales exclaimed: 'Goddamighty.' He watched Roger pour out, took the refilled glass, sipped this time and savoured, and then asked: 'How quick?'

'Tonight.'

'Slave-driver as always.' Whales gave a gargantuan yawn and Roger did not think the weariness was wholly assumed. 'Where is it?'

'It will be upstairs in the laboratory in half an hour.'

'Must go and eat first,' Whales said. 'I'll be back.'

He heaved himself up and padded out.

Roger called Cannon Row, told them to bring Sheldon's body over to the Yard, and had hardly finished when the door opened and the messenger came in with a pile of succulent-looking ham sandwiches and a pot of coffee.

'I didn't think I would disturb you while Dr Whales was here, sir.'

'Quite right,' said Roger. 'I'd hate to share these ' He started on the sandwiches at once, poured out a cup of coffee, and hoped he would be spared ten minutes without interruption. He had seven or eight before the telephone bell rang.

He let it ring for half a minute, while finishing the sandwiches, then picked up the receiver. It might be Kebble, or the City of London Police, Sandys, or young Scott.

'Excuse me,' said the operator, 'but there's a woman on the line who wants to speak to someone urgently, sir. She sounds in some distress. It's about that photograph in the *Globe*. I know you are handling that.'

'What's her name?' asked Roger, almost without thinking.

'She says she's a Miss Doreen Morrison.'

Roger felt as if some kind of delayed action shock had caught

up with him, and for a moment he could hardly speak. Then he said harshly:

'Put her through, and make sure someone takes a tape recording of the conversation. If I can get an address from her, or a telephone number, I want her traced – Information will see to it.' He found himself gripping the telephone tightly as the operator said: 'Very good, sir.' A moment later she went on: 'You're through to Superintendent West.'

Roger said: 'This is Superintendent West. Can I help you, Miss Morrison?'

It seemed an age before she answered, so long that Roger began to wonder if she had gone off the line.

## 5

# Terror

'ARE YOU THERE?' Roger forced himself to be brisk. 'Did you hear me?'

After another pause, a girl said huskily: 'Yes. Yes, I heard you. Do you – do you know about my sister's photograph?' The words seemed to come reluctantly, as if she were too tired to speak clearly.

Roger could pretend not to know that the photograph had been this girl's 'sister', or he could make her realize he knew a great deal. She could ask questions afterwards.

'Yes, I do,' he said. 'Where are you?'

She didn't speak.

'Did you hear me?' Roger felt acutely frustrated, and cold with anxiety. There was no way of checking the telephone she was speaking from unless she gave the exchange and number.

She seemed to stifle a yawn. 'I don't – I don't know where I am.'

It was almost as if she did not know what she was saying, as if her mind or her memory had gone. The vital thing was to find her, and this might be his only chance.

'Miss Morrison, listen very carefully, will you?' Roger said.

There was a sound like a sigh 'Yes.'

'Is there a number on the telephone in front of you?'

'A – what?'

'A number.'

She paused again, and he had to wait for her. Then she answered, for the first time she seemed to be alert.

'Yes, it's Notting Hill 4785 – I *think* the last number is 3. Yes, it's 3. Notting Hill 47853.'

'If we get cut off I'll know where to telephone you,' Roger spoke quite matter-of-factly, a reassurance in itself. 'Are you all right?'

'I – I'm frightened,' Doreen Morrison said. 'I've been – I've been frightened for so long.' There was another pause, before she burst out: 'Is Denise all right? *Please* tell me. How did you get her photograph? Is she all right?'

'I'm going to tell you all about it as soon as I can,' Roger said. 'I don't want to talk much on the telephone. Are you indoors or out of doors?'

'Out of doors,' Doreen said. 'I got away from —' She broke off, with a little gasp. 'Oh, please,' she gasped. 'Please.'

Roger felt quite sure that she wasn't talking to him. For the first time urgency touched with alarm sounded in his voice.

'Doreen! Stay where you are. I will be with you in —'

The line went dead, and stayed dead for perhaps fifteen seconds, before the Yard operator spoke in an agitated voice:

'She's gone, sir.'

'Did you talk to Information?'

'Oh, yes.'

'Put me through to —'

'The Inspector in charge is on the line for you, sir.' The girl broke off and Robinson's calm voice replaced hers

'I've two squad and two patrol cars converging on the call-box. We'll pick her up. Don't worry'

'Where was she speaking from?'

'A call-box at the corner of Nash Street, near —'

'I know Nash Street,' Roger said. 'I'll go straight there.'

He rang off, stretched for his hat, and hurried out. A minute later he was at the door of the nearest sergeants' room. Three

men in a huddle probably over a smutty joke, all straightened up.

'One of you, take over in my office,' Roger said. 'Tell the operator to put anyone who calls about Denise Morrison – know whom I'm talking about?'

'Yes, sir – this morning's unknown.'

'Right. Have all calls about her put through to you. I'm interested in anyone who knows her as Morrison or Brown, and I want to be able to talk to them tonight Got that?'

Three big men spoke like eager schoolboys. 'Yes, sir.'

Roger went hurrying on.

A constable was standing by his car, and opened it as Roger reached it.

'A bit late going home, sir.'

'If only I was,' Roger almost groaned.

In fact, the thought was little more than a reaction; he wanted only to be at Notting Hill Gate for the next half-hour. If anything had happened to the other sister —

Surely it couldn't.

If Kebble or anyone else said that to him, he would rasp: Don't be a damned fool.

Of course it could.

He could hear the girl saying she was frightened; he could hear her saying: 'Please, oh please,' in a tone of horror and in desperate pleading.

'Please,' Doreen Morrison said with a catch in her voice. 'Please don't take me back to that room.'

The man at the door of the telephone kiosk, a small man with thin, dark hair and a thin, pale face and wishy-washy blue eyes, smiled at her. He had a charming smile; it seemed intended to take a load of anxiety off her.

'You will be all right,' he assured her. 'Don't you want to see your sister again?'

'Yes, yes, but you promised I would see her this afternoon.'

'She was delayed,' the small man said. He took Doreen's arm, and held it very tightly, tucked under his elbow, so that she had to keep pace with him; if she didn't, it would hurt. She knew, because he had held her like that before.

He hurried along the narrow street – Nash Street, which led off the main road from Bayswater. There were tall, narrow houses all joined together. Many people thronged the streets, most of them black-skinned. No one took any notice of Doreen or the man. They reached a corner of a street which was even narrower. Here the dim lights at windows and the slightly brighter ones at the street lamps showed the dilapidated houses, front rooms overcrowded with people but with very little furniture.

'Please —' Doreen began.

The man gave her arm a twist. Pain streaked from her wrist to her elbow, shot up to her shoulder.

'*Oh!*'

'Don't talk any more,' the man ordered roughly.

A car passed. In it were two men who looked like policemen. They glanced at her. She knew that she appeared to be walking happily arm-in-arm with her companion. He twisted again, and she turned her head away from the police involuntarily, because the pain was so great.

The car was a long way off when she was able to look straight ahead again. Fewer people were here – and fewer houses. This was a deserted area, with few buildings standing after the bombing which had devastated so much of London before she had been born.

One house had two lighted windows and a light at the front door; otherwise it was in darkness The man propelled her towards it. As she drew nearer she felt panic born of the quiet terror which had been with her for so long. She had been in that house for two weeks, almost a prisoner, believing that she had to stay if she wanted to help Denise.

Suddenly, awfully, she knew that Denise was dead.

In that moment, walking against her will through the semi-darkness of the street, she seemed to see the photograph which had been in the *Daily Globe* more vividly than she had before. Denise was dead; Denise, sleeping, had never looked like that.

They were close to the front door of the house The small man's grip on her slackened because they were so near. Out of panic and desperation Doreen felt an upsurge of courage. She

must not go with this man. Denise was dead, and anything might happen to her.

She pulled herself free.

She pushed the man and kicked him. He went staggering to one side. She began to run, skirt riding up her slim legs, higher, higher, giving her greater freedom of movement. She raced along. Not many months ago she had run in the State Championships at Adelaide, third in the two thousand yards. She felt like the wind. She did not look round, it might lose her precious seconds. She heard no sound of footsteps in pursuit. As she began to gasp for breath, she felt a great sense of elation.

He wasn't chasing her. He —

He appeared in front of her, from a side alley. There was a smear of blood on his forehead. He wasn't smiling; he looked as if he could kill.

'No!' she cried.

She dodged to one side, but he shot out his leg and she tripped. She had not a second to prepare herself, and just crashed down. Surprise and shock were so complete that she did not know even a spasm of fear. She struck her head against the pavement and lost consciousness. She was not even aware that the little man bent down, picked her up, and began to carry her towards the alley which led round the back of the derelict houses.

A police car waited at the corner of Nash Street as Roger drew up. A divisional detective sergeant, a man in his fifties, came up and put his head through the open window.

'Any luck?' Roger demanded.

'Not yet,' the sergeant answered casually

Roger said harshly: 'You mean you've lost her.'

'Never had her to lose,' the divisional man retorted; he was too old a hand to worry too much or be too troubled by a Yard officer in a bad temper.

'Has anyone seen her?' asked Roger.

'Can't be sure,' the divisional man replied. 'Our chaps and the Flying Squad boys are following several leads. Only a matter of time, Super.'

'Time,' Roger echoed. He sounded as bitter as he felt, and

the divisional man realized something was seriously wrong but did not know what it was. It did not seem to trouble him. Roger opened the door of his car and got out. There was no sense in antagonizing this man, who was simply doing a routine job.

His radio sounded: 'Calling Superintendent West. Calling . . .'

Roger stretched inside and picked up the receiver.

'West speaking.'

'Information here,' a man said. 'Two messages for you, sir. Detective Sergeant Kebble is on his way back from the airport, and will be in your office whatever time you return.'

'Yes.'

'A Mr Lancelot Smith is coming to see you in about an hour's time – he will have the list of passengers and officers of the SS *Kookaburra* with him. Should have said that was a message from the City chaps, sir.'

'Good,' said Roger. 'Thanks.' He put back the receiver, only a little less gloomy. They had lost the girl, and there could be no doubt of danger to her. He turned away from the telephone as a car drew up just behind him He recognized a sergeant of the Flying Squad, but the puzzling thing was that the man was on his own.

As he got out, obviously in a hurry, he recognized Roger.

'Evening, sir. I think we might know where that girl is.'

Roger's heart began to thump.

'Where?'

'I was going along with another sergeant, and saw her and a man who fits the description put out earlier – the man of London Airport, sir Short, small chap, pale, thin dark hair. Fair girl was with him. They were walking very close together. She didn't look as if she was having fun, though.'

'Where's the other sergeant?'

'Keeping track of them. They're in Johnson Street.'

'Take me there, will you?' Roger said. He saw the Divisional man's eyes brighten, and suddenly remembered his Christian name. 'Charley, spread the word round – and close in on Johnson Street.'

'Right away!' Charley looked delighted.

Roger got in with the Flying Squad man, who started off as if he would ram any car which got in his way. He swung round one corner, then another, driving with the effortless ease of the expert.

'Describe the girl,' Roger ordered.

'Fair, about five-four, good figure, rather full calves – very general I know, but so was the description.'

'Could be the right one,' Roger agreed He was aware of the number of coloured people staring, because the car was moving so fast. They took another corner, missing a cyclist by a foot or so. Roger bit his lip. The Squad man slowed down perceptibly, and by the time they reached the next cross-roads, they seemed to be crawling. A man appeared from the doorway of a house which was in utter darkness.

Roger recognized a sergeant of the Flying Squad, who spoke before anyone had a chance to speak

'They're in that house across the road.'

'Sure?' demanded Roger.

'Positive Two local uniformed men are at the back, sir.'

The house across the road had lights at two ground floor windows; everywhere else was in darkness except the front door, where a dim light shone through frosted glass panels.

'I'm going over,' Roger said. 'Don't stand on any ceremony if there seems to be any trouble.'

The sergeant who had brought him here said hastily: 'Let me go, sir.'

'Not this time.' Roger smiled, and turned in the near-darkness. Nothing would release him from his present tension except action.

The other man was right, this wasn't a job for a senior officer. But he felt a strange sense of personal involvement, an irresistible compulsion to go himself It was as if he accepted the full responsibility for making sure that Doreen Morrison did not suffer the same fate as her sister.

# 6

# Needle

DOREEN KEPT ON thinking 'No, no, no.' She had come round halfway up the dark stairs of the house where she had slept that day. The man, Jessup, was half-carrying, half dragging her up them. He was breathing very hard, making a whistling sound through his nostrils. His footsteps clumped and slithered on the boards of the stairs. A board creaked loudly. He stopped and let Doreen slide down so that she rested on her feet, leaning against him. Her breasts pushed against his thin chest, but she was oblivious of that, oblivious of the way her skirt had rucked up high above her knees.

The refrain did not stop 'No, no, no.'

Yet she was too dazed, too weak, to think or to struggle. She heard sounds and was aware of movement. Then a loud creak made her realize that the door of her room had opened.

She gasped: 'No!'

She made a tremendous effort, and thrust herself backwards, away from him. On that instant she heard him swear, viciously, obscenely. Their bodies were no longer touching, but suddenly she felt his hands at her neck. With furious strength he gripped her. The breath seemed to be locked in her lungs, suddenly there was hard, frightening pressure round them. Hands still clutching, Jessup held her at arms' length and pushed her backwards. Her legs almost doubled up. She would have fallen but for that terrible pressure on her neck. Her chest was heaving as she tried to draw in breath, but his hold was too tight, the pressure on her lungs seemed to crush her.

He flung her away from him.

The back of her legs caught against the edge of the divan bed. She toppled back, and fell heavily, but she could *breathe*. Air forced itself into her lungs, the pain of relief from pressure was almost as great as the pain from the pressure itself. She was

past thinking, almost past caring, because the precious air was hers again, and the steel-like band across her chest had broken.

Light went on, she was aware of it.

Jessup moved, and she knew that too, but did not know where he went or what he did. The light was bright against her eyes, and all she wanted was to lie there, eyes shut tightly, the breath of life creeping into her.

There were shadowy movements; Jessup's.

There were tiny, metallic sounds, as well as the sound of his laboured breathing.

Doreen did not know that he was preparing a hypodermic syringe, filling it from the ampoule which quivered in his right hand. Breathlessness, fear, perhaps even a kind of hatred for himself made his whole body quiver. There was a sucking sound as the deadly liquid filled the glass body of the syringe.

Her eyes flickered open.

In a moment of terrible clarity she realized what he was about to do. Her skirt was rucked up to her waist, inches of her thigh were bare. He held the hypodermic syringe in his right hand. She gave a convulsive leap but he anticipated it. He thrust his left hand down with crushing weight on to her breast, forcing her against the bed, and raised his right leg and bent it and knelt on her legs right on the knee caps. She was now so petrified that all she could hear was the thumping of her heart. She saw Jessup's face contorted as if in rage, saw his lips move as if in speech. She made a desperate but hopeless effort to shift to one side, but could not.

The hall of the house was empty when Roger stepped into it. Faint sounds of music came from a room on the right, the door of which was open The other door, on the left, was closed, but light shone beneath it and at one side.

He heard footsteps on bare boards, and stood for a few seconds, straining his ears. Undoubtedly they were on the stairs, some way up. The music seemed to grow louder, and to drown them. He started to climb, peering upwards all the time. The only light came from a tiny bulb at a landing almost straight above his head. Beyond it there were vague, moving shadows. He went up quickly, keeping to one side, for stairs did not

squeak so loudly close to the wall. He was halfway up when he heard a loud creak above him – a long way above That was followed by more footsteps, a rumble of sound as if someone was staggering.

He thought he heard a gasp, perhaps a stifled scream.

He raced up the stairs, as a door slammed. The light was on this landing, and he saw nothing beyond but darkness. He sped up the next flight of stairs to a second landing, and as he reached it light framed a door above his head.

The light had just been switched on.

He went towards it with controlled speed, making hardly a sound. The music had faded, all he could hear were movements beyond the door now framed with light. He could rush at it, or approach with stealth. Was the girl in acute danger at this moment? He told himself that he could not even be positive that Doreen Morrison was there. If Kebble or any junior acted on impulse, as he was doing, he would slap them down hard when he heard of it.

He reached the landing and the door.

He had to be sure Doreen was inside. He might hear a word or two of vital importance if he listened, too. He pressed his ear close to the door, every nerve strained to catch any sound.

He thought someone was gasping for breath. There was another noise, a muffled voice, a creaking of springs He could thrust open this door and disturb two people in the privacy of their deep passions; drunk or sober they had every right. . .

He had to take the chance, so he turned the handle, and pushed; the door opened a few inches, without creaking In the bright light of a single lamp he saw a man kneeling on a girl, whose legs alone showed, whose head and body were hidden. The man's right arm was held high and the light glinted on a hypodermic syringe and its needle.

*'I didn't want to kill you,'* the man was saying in a gasping way.

Roger said in a taut voice: 'You're not going to.'

He thrust the door wide open as the man spun round. For a moment the girl's head and shoulders appeared. She looked as pale as death and her eyes were closed. Her skirt was rucked up about her waist, her right stocking was a mass of ladders.

The man did not speak, just stood there with the syringe still in his right hand He was almost as pale as the girl, and his pallor made his eyes look black as beads. He was short, weak-looking, and his hair grew far back from his forehead.

Roger went a step nearer, his mouth very dry.

'Drop that syringe,' he ordered. 'I am a detective officer, and —'

'Get away,' the little man said in a choky voice

'Drop it, and don't waste time.' Roger took a step nearer, but was very wary. This man was desperate; that showed in his eyes and in the tension of his body. 'Do as you're told.'

He began to move forward again.

The little man took a step towards him, the syringe held forward in his right hand, like a dagger His thumb was on the plunger. If he got too close he could jab that needle in.

How much was a fatal dose?

'Drop it!' Roger barked.

The man leapt at him, needle thrusting at his face. As it came it seemed to become enormous, looming as deadly as a rapier. In that split second Roger felt wild panic. If he swept the arm aside the needle might jab into his arm or his hand.

It was like a blinding light.

He dropped to his knees. The man's sleeve brushed the top of his head but there was no sharp pain. He brought his head up with all the force he could, into the man's groin, and heard the agonized, hissing intake of breath as the man staggered back. The syringe dropped close to Roger's knees. He got up, hardly breathing, staring at the man, who had banged into a chair and was now doubled up in anguish. Roger raised his right foot. The impulse to stamp on the syringe was almost overwhelming. He brought his foot down, but at the last second snatched it away. A little liquid had oozed out of the needle and made a tiny blob on the shiny linoleum.

The other man straightened up, made a futile effort to attack again, and was caught with a spasm of pain. Roger forced himself to act, stepped past him, caught his right wrist, and thrust his arm up behind him in a hammer-lock. He didn't say a word as he stared at the girl.

She still lay on her back, staring at him, as if she was petrified.

'It's all right,' Roger said gently. 'You needn't worry any more.'

Her lips were parted, her eyes wide open, velvety eyes but vacant now.

'You're going to be all right,' Roger assured her. 'I'll be back in —'

He broke off, tensing up for a moment. There was a sound at the door, and no way of being sure that the man hadn't an accomplice. Then the big form of the Flying Squad man blocked the doorway.

'You okay, sir?' he was anxious.

'Yes ' Roger could hardly hear his own voice, it was so hoarse. 'Take this chap, charge him with attempting to cause grievous bodily harm, and have him sent to the Yard at once.'

'Right!' The Flying Squad man seemed glad of the chance. Then he caught sight of the girl, and gaped.

'Tell Charley to send a doctor here,' Roger said. 'Shock case, mostly.' As the other moved forward, his voice sharpened. 'Mind that needle!' The man's big foot was only inches away from the syringe. He evaded it, and took a grip on the little man's arm.

Roger was staring at the girl, and the Flying Squad man hadn't got a good grip The prisoner wrenched himself free and hurtled towards the door. The sergeant shot out a foot, and the man ran into it and pitched forward. The sergeant moved very quickly for a big man, bent down, and yanked him to his feet by the scruff of his neck.

'I'll watch him, sir.'

Roger nodded. He turned back to the girl, but she hadn't moved, and was staring in that vacant way just as she had before. Her skirt was still rucked up. She had full, firm thighs, and he noticed her rather big but well-shaped calves. She wore a frilly white blouse which looked grubby.

Roger drew closer. There was no blemish on the girl's legs or on her cheeks, just the pallor of someone who had been ill, and kept indoors for a long time He pulled up a chair and sat close to her, taking her hand and feeling for her pulse.

'You've nothing else to worry about,' he assured her gently. 'You're quite safe now. I'm Superintendent West. You talked to me on the telephone. Do you remember?'

She didn't speak; he could not even be sure that she heard him. Her pulse was slow, her forehead cold.

'You have nothing else to worry about,' he assured her again.

He was almost glad that she did not appear to understand, for it was not true. When she recovered, and the effect of this shock had gone, she would be faced with the news of the death of her sister.

'Do you know the name of the man who was with you?' he asked.

It was a formality. He had at least to try to make her answer questions, but there was no hope of an answer.

'You can be absolutely sure you have nothing more to worry about,' he repeated with great deliberation. If he could make her understand that it might give her sufficient strength to draw on later.

Two things happened in the next moment, when he was preoccupied only with thought of helping Doreen Morrison. Her eyes widened, as if in sudden fear, and as he thought it was due to sharp recollection of what had happened, he heard a squeak behind him, as of a footstep on the shiny linoleum.

He felt an almost irresistible impulse to jump round, but stayed close to the girl. Her lips began to quiver and there was no doubt of her fear. Another squeak sounded – closer. A gasping sound came from the girl, terror was in her eyes.

Without getting up, Roger swung round, sending the chair flying.

A man was only two or three feet away from him, reaching forward, a knife in his hand held as if to plunge into Roger's back – or into the girl's breast. Roger kept going, arms outstretched, clutching at the man's legs. In that split second he had no time to think, his actions were based on reflexes, not on thought. He saw the man's right foot move, realized what was coming; that the man was going to kick him. He made another desperate effort to clutch the other's foot, then saw the shiny toe of the shoe swinging towards him; it seemed like the foot

of a giant. He rolled to one side. The foot scraped along his temple, rasping and painful but with little force.

The girl screamed – a piercing sound of horror.

*God!*

Roger squirmed round, on the floor. The man was standing over the girl, his right arm raised. Roger could not see the knife but knew it was in that poised right hand ready to sweep down into the girl's body. The foot of the divan was close to Roger, but the man was out of reach. Roger placed both hands on the side of the divan and thrust with all his strength. The divan shifted with startling speed, casters sliding over the smooth floor. The man by it struck his murderous blow, but the knife plunged into the divan, inches from the girl.

The door banged open. A man called:

'Are you all right?'

The man by the bed snatched at the knife, touched but failed to grasp it, then rushed at a police constable who was already halfway across the room. The constable looked small and frail, the would be murderer big and powerful. He did exactly as he had with Roger: kicked out brutally His foot caught the policeman in the groin, and as the uniformed man went staggering back, the attacker rushed out of the room. There was a shout, a bang, a thud.

Roger picked himself up, heavily. The policeman banged against a chair, and doubled up The girl lay absolutely still, staring at the door.

It opened, and a plain clothes man appeared.

'Did you get him?' asked Roger.

'The man who ran out of here – no, sir. He ducked into another room and out of a window. Are you all right?'

Roger said slowly: 'Yes Go downstairs and have a general call put out for the man. Height about six feet, swarthy skinned, broad nose, wearing dark clothes, a dark scarf, and a cloth cap. Say where he was last seen Got all that?'

'Yes, sir.' The man hurried out.

Roger went over to the policeman, who was bending down with his knees tightly pressed together. He straightened up, looking very pale.

'Want any help?' Roger asked.

'Often had worse while kicking a football about,' the man said ruefully.

Roger went back to the girl. She had not moved, and did not appear to see him. He studied the knife. The handle was covered with cloth, like a bandaged finger, and there would be no prints on it. He pulled it out The blade was razor sharp and had a needle point.

He could not repress a shudder.

Footsteps sounded on the stairs, and soon a snowy-haired young man appeared, carrying a bag. A squad sergeant was just behind him. The first man was a Divisional Police Surgeon. He came forward with a diffidence which reminded Roger of weak-chinned Cyril Gee, of London Airport.

'Your patient,' Roger said, standing up.

The girl gave no sign that she had heard.

Roger went across and began to pick up the syringe, handling it with great care. Soon the Divisional men were here in strength, photographers, fingerprint men, every expert who might help. It would have been superfluous to give instructions; these men knew exactly what was wanted. Roger waited until Doreen Morrison was taken out on a stretcher, and had a word with a Divisional Detective Inspector who came to take charge.

'I'll take the knife over to the Yard,' Roger said.

'Let me check it first, will you?' the Divisional man asked. 'I'll send it over.'

'Suit yourself,' Roger agreed.

Two uniformed policemen including the victim of the attack were at the front of the house, where a crowd had gathered, mostly Jamaicans; there were a surprising number of children, whose big, dark eyes reminded Roger of Doreen. Someone had brought his own car up, and one of the policemen pushed his way towards it and opened the door for Roger.

'Thanks.' He nodded and drove off. Soon he was out of the narrow streets and in the wide thoroughfares. He turned towards the West End. It was nearly half past nine, he was going to be home very late. He stifled a yawn; bursts of action and bursts of tension took more out of him these days than they had a few years ago. He wasn't so quick, either, he thought sourly, or

he would not have let the second attacker get away. Angry with himself, and suffering from reaction, he pulled off the main road near Marble Arch, lit a cigarette, and switched on the car radio. There was a Brahms Concerto, he didn't know its name. He made himself relax for ten minutes, half listening, thinking over all that had happened. Then he jerked himself out of the reverie, and drove to the Yard. The courtyard was almost empty but as he pulled in two Squad cars raced out with their usual fierce urgency.

No one spoke to him on the way to his office. He saw light at the sides, and heard voices. Kebble and who? The shipping agency manager, Smith, of course. He whistled a tune to announce his arrival. When he opened the door, Kebble was heading for it.

'Hallo, sir.'

'Hallo, Sergeant.'

'I've just been talking to Division about what happened.'

'Been quite a night, hasn't it?' Roger said.

A man was rising from the armchair. Sitting, he seemed quite normal, but on his feet he was very short – almost a dwarf. He had rather big, coarse features, heavy-lidded eyes, big hands.

'This is Mr Lancelot Smith, sir.'

'I am pleased to meet you.' Smith had a deep, rasping voice. 'And very distressed indeed to hear about the death of two people who were passengers on the SS *Kookaburra* I have with me the list of passengers.' His accent was very slightly foreign and his enunciation too precise. He handed Roger a printed list, and then added: 'Also a list of the ship's officers.' He handed this over, and Roger saw a passport size photograph against each name. 'Also of the crew, if that is of assistance.'

Roger took the lists, glancing almost casually at the photographs until he saw one which made him forget everything else.

The man he had stopped from killing Doreen Morrison was here, Third Officer Thomas Jessup of the SS *Kookaburra.*

# 7

# Death Afar Off

LANCELOT SMITH obviously realized that there was trouble. Kebble, in the background, moved forward to look at the photographs. Roger put his forefinger on Jessup, and asked:

'How well do you know the crew?'

'In person, hardly at all except the Captain, Chief Officer and Chief Engineer. Otherwise I know their history and record. This was the Third Officer. Do you know him?'

'Yes, slightly. You said "was".'

'He left the ship in London.'

'Wasn't he signed on for a round trip?'

'He was unsatisfactory,' Smith declared.

'In what way?'

'Superintendent, such matters are confidential.'

'We are investigating a murder.'

Smith moistened his thick lips.

'I wish to assist in every way I can, of course. This would be in confidence, would it not?'

'Yes.'

'There were thefts on board the ship, mostly from the crew and officers, some from the passengers. Jessup was asked to leave the ship.'

'Did you accuse him of theft?'

'There is no doubt he knew why he was not wanted.'

'What would you expect him to do?'

Smith shrugged. 'Get another ship, no doubt.'

'So that he could repeat his thefts there?'

Smith said slowly: 'Nothing was proved, Superintendent. You cannot ruin a man because of suspicion.'

'Who else knew of these suspicions?'

'The Captain, Chief Officer, and Chief Engineer knew offi-

cially.' Smith raised a big, ungainly hand. 'Why are you so interested in this man?'

'He is under a charge of attempting to cause bodily harm to another of the *Kookaburra's* passengers,' Roger answered datly.

'Another?' Smith sounded shocked.

'And he will probably be charged with committing one of the murders,' Roger went on 'I want all available information about him as early as possible, Mr Smith. Everything.'

'I shall cable for further details tonight,' Smith promised. He looked scared now, and very ugly; almost cretinous.

'Did he have access to poisons?' Roger asked.

'*Poisons?*'

It would be easy to lose one's temper with this man.

'Presumably the *Kookaburra* carried medical supplies.'

Smith took out a handkerchief and dabbed the back of his thick neck.

'That is so,' he admitted. 'Had Jessup —' He moistened his lips.

'Yes?'

'Jessup was our first-aid officer, in charge of supplies of the Sick Bay. You think he stole poisons —' Smith's voice trailed off.

'It's certainly possible,' said Roger. 'Do you know if any digitalis was carried on board?'

'I – I cannot be sure. I will find out from Sydney, as quickly as I can.'

'Where is the *Kookaburra* now?'

'She is four days out of Hong Kong, heading for Sydney.'

'How long will the voyage take?'

'Usually it would take twelve days.'

'Are the rest of the officers the same as on the outward voyage?'

'Yes, Superintendent.'

'What about the crew?'

'It is mostly a Chinese crew, and there were few changes. These I can check for you in the morning.' Smith backed to his chair and sat down, dabbing at his forehead.

'Do you know if a man answering this description was among the crew?' Roger repeated the description he had already broadcast to the Divisions. It was vague; his own impression of the man with the cap pulled low over his eyes and the scarf up over his chin *was* vague.

'It might answer a number of people,' Smith said reasonably. 'But no one I knew on board the *Kookaburra* was like that. No one. You – you said that Jessup attacked *another* passenger?'

'He attacked Doreen Morrison,' Roger told him. 'Have you the European or United Kingdom addresses of the other passengers on the outward journey?'

'Yes,' Smith said. He pointed to the passenger list in Roger's hand. 'They are all there. But – but you have caught Jessup, you say.' For the first time the shipping man seemed to brighten. 'He can do no more harm, then? There is no danger for the other passengers.'

'We don't know yet,' Roger said. 'There's far too much we don't know. Is there any reason why Jessup should want to kill the two Morrison girls, or Mr Sheldon?'

'I know of none.'

'Did they ever accuse him of theft?'

'I do not know.'

'Are you sure you don't?'

'Yes, Superintendent.' Smith acquired an unexpected dignity as he squared his shoulders. 'I am quite sure. However, some of the passengers accused him, that is certain. I do not know who they were. It was a matter for the ship's master, you understand.'

'Surely he would log any such charge?'

'I did not see his log,' Smith said. 'Superintendent, I will afford you all the help in my power but I cannot give you information which is not at my disposal.'

After a pause, Roger forced a smile.

'No, of course not.' He wondered whether he was too much on edge, perhaps suffering from shock reaction, or whether Lancelot Smith's appearance was sufficiently grotesque for him to take a dislike to the man, and so be prejudiced. 'You've been very good. I would like the address, telephone number, and

cable address of your Sydney office, then we needn't worry you again until the morning.'

Smith's eyes positively glistened.

'All the information is on the lists, the Sydney and London postal and cable addresses, all are there. Superintendent, anything I can do is as good as done.'

'Thank you,' Roger said. 'Mr Smith.'

'Yes?'

'Do you know of any reason why anyone should want to kill passengers of your ship?'

'It is a complete mystery to me,' Smith declared earnestly. 'A complete mystery. Unless perhaps Jessup is not a sane man. A psychopath might be so deeply insulted that he would kill anyone who —' Smith stopped, as if he knew that Roger wasn't impressed, as if he himself was not really impressed by his own arguments. In a whispering voice he insisted: 'It is possible. There are such men.'

'Perhaps there are,' Roger said. 'Sergeant, show Mr Smith the main door, will you?'

Smith did not offer to shake hands, but went out as if he could not get away from Roger quickly enough. The two sets of footsteps sounded along the passage, but soon faded Roger turned to his desk, rounded it, and sat down. There was something in Smith's manner he didn't like at all. By now he should have thrown off any reaction, should be elated. The girl was alive, and shock symptoms would not last long. One murderer was caught, the other would be picked up soon.

How could he say that with certainty?

All the years of experience warned him against taking anything for granted, but surely Jessup *was* the murderer of Denise Morrison and Sheldon He had the description from Cyril Gee which tallied, the man himself, the hypodermic syringe in his pocket. He had actually seen Jessup in the act of plunging the needle in What doubt could there be? He took the syringe out of his pocket and put it on the blotting-pad in front of him. Needle and glass glistened. He heard Kebble's footsteps, and Kebble opened the door and stalked in.

'Take this thing up to the lab. and have the contents analysed,' Roger said. 'Tell 'em it might be digitalis.'

'Right.' Kebble leaned across and picked up the blotting-pad.

'Where does Cyril Gee live?'

'Victoria – just behind the Army and Navy Stores,' Kebble answered.

'Know his phone number?'

'Victoria 81345.'

Roger grinned. 'Thanks' He picked up the telephone and gave the number before Kebble reached the door. 'Keb.'

Keb turned, balancing the blotting-pad.

'What did you make of Smith?'

'I thought he had a load on his mind,' Kebble said grimly. 'I had a feeling he knew there was trouble brewing.'

Roger nodded, Kebble went out, the telephone bell rang. It was so often, too often, like this; no time really to think, to get a balanced view, to test one's own reactions for mistakes and the facts for fallacies.

'Your Victoria number, sir,' the operator said.

'Thanks. . . . Mr Gee?' Roger put his reflections aside and made his voice sound affable.

Gee did not.

'I thought you weren't going to bother us —' there was a fractional pause, before he corrected: 'bother me again.'

'Only in emergency,' Roger said. 'I'm really sorry. Can you come over to the Yard?'

'What, *now*?'

'Yes, please,' Roger said. 'I'll gladly send a car for you.'

'Oh, all right,' Gee said, with ill grace. 'I'll be ready in ten minutes.' There was a whisper of sound in the background, then Gee hung up across his own rather miserable: 'I can't refuse.'

Roger was smiling faintly. All his awareness of the way people lived did not save him from a prudish reaction of surprise if there were indications of pre-marital getting together. Did they share a flat? What the hell was it to do with him? He rang off, telephoned the sergeants' room, sent a man to pick up Gee, and then sat back. The Yard was very quiet. He was feeling easier in his mind, the sense of brooding danger was almost gone. If only word would come of the capture of the man who

had attacked him and the girl at Notting Hill Gate, he would be himself again.

A man called: 'Have you an appointment, sir?'

Hurried footsteps followed, drawing nearer Roger heard two men approaching, and pushed his chair back. Lancelot Smith appeared, mouth open and breathing very hard; a messenger was behind him, looking questioningly at Roger.

'It's all right,' Roger told him. 'Yes, Mr Smith?'

Smith came right in.

'There's something – I ought to – have told you.' He gasped for breath after every two or three words, partly from nerves, partly because he had hurried. 'I couldn't – bring myself – to.'

The man behind him closed the door.

'Very good of you to come back,' Roger said, rounding his desk 'Sit down and take your time.' He held the man's arm as he sat down 'Would you like a drink?'

'No thank – thank you. I don't – drink alcohol.' Smith sat on the edge of his chair, that near-cretinous face twisted in distress. 'One of the – one of the other ship's officers died in – in mysterious circumstances in Hong Kong. Four days ago. It was – sudden death, like these people here, but – but – but —'

He could not utter the words.

'Jessup couldn't have killed him, could he?' Roger helped out. All his own fears and anxieties flooded back, but he forced himself to speak dispassionately: 'Let me have the full details, please.'

He was writing: *First Engineer, Neil Sanderson, native of Townsville, Queensland, aged 24* – when Kebble came in. Kebble showed how startled he was only for a moment, then behaved as if he had expected to find Smith here.

'What time is it in Hong Kong?' Roger asked Kebble, when Smith had gone.

'About five or six hours ahead of us, aren't they?' Kebble said.

'Find out, then see if you can get a senior officer on the telephone. If you can't, cable for details of this engineer's death.' Roger was very brisk.

'Right.'

'I'll go and see Cyril Gee,' Roger said.

He went out, as Kebble picked up the telephone. It was ten o'clock, and he felt as if the night would never end. He plonked his feet down heavily, trying not to hurry too much. Gee was in a waiting-room one floor below. He was standing up, giving an impression of angry impatience. He looked tired; and he looked as weak-willed as a man could.

'I hope this is necessary,' he said, more peevish than tart.

'If it weren't I wouldn't have asked you to come,' Roger said. 'I've arranged for an identification parade across at Cannon Row Police Station – half a minute away. I hope you will see someone whom you recognize.'

'You've *got* him?' Gee's voice rose on that instant.

'I've a suspect,' Roger said. 'Don't speak until we're out of earshot, will you?'

He felt as nearly sure as he could that Gee would pick out Jessup as the man who had jabbed a needle into Sheldon at the airport, but as they entered the room where two policemen and five men in ordinary clothes were waiting, he felt a wave of doubt The five men were all much the same in appearance, on the small side, and each wore dark clothes and a dark trilby hat. The lighting was simulated daylight, as good as one could get for identification at night.

They passed along the line, where Jessup was in the middle. They passed in front of each man and Gee did not show any sign of recognition; he was over his peevishness, apparently right on top of himself.

They went out.

'It was the man in the middle,' Gee stated flatly. 'You've got him all right. Congratulations. Sorry I was so bad-tempered.'

'Forget it.' Roger warmed to him. 'I needn't keep you any longer tonight but I may have to call you as a witness later.'

Gee grimaced.

'My fiancée told me from the start that I was a mug to get involved in this,' he said. 'She doesn't go for that guff about the responsibility of the citizen.'

'It's a good thing you do, or we might still be looking for this chap, and another girl might have been dead.' Roger shook

hands very firmly, only half amused by the glow of delight in Gee's eyes; the man wasn't much more than twenty-two or three, only a couple of years or so older than his own boys. He saw Gee to the Yard's gate himself, and saw and heard him driven off. Roger went back to Cannon Row, relieved in one way, anxious and uncertain in another There was something on his mind, something he'd forgotten. He could not recall it. Jessup hadn't yet uttered a word, and now he had to be questioned It might take a long, long time. He stifled a yawn, and went into Cannon Row Police Station. First a cup of strong coffee, then —

The night duty Inspector of the police station was walking along the passage towards Roger. There was no doubt that he brought trouble with him. Tall, grey-haired, one of the most experienced and reliable officers on the Force, this was one of the few occasions when Roger had seen his looks give him away.

Roger waited for the blow.

'Jessup's killed himself,' the Inspector announced bluntly. 'He'd a tablet of cyanide of potassium hidden. He knew he'd be identified, of course, knew he hadn't a chance.'

Roger stood absolutely still.

'I'm damned sorry,' the Cannon Row man went on 'And I can't blame anvone but myself. I was present when he was searched. How bad does that make things for you?'

After a pause, Roger said bitterly: 'God alone knows.' Now he had no cause at all for elation, only for a new kind of anxiety. If a man would kill himself rather than be made to talk, what cause did he serve? What hideous secrets had he taken into death?

Roger gripped the other man's forearm.

'Bad luck, Jim ' He paused again, and then went on: 'I'd better go and see him.'

# 8

# Message From Hong Kong

HALF AN HOUR later Roger turned into his office, where the lights blazed. He was still needled by the sense of some unknown but terrible thing, by a desperate anxiety to learn the truth He wondered when Doreen Morrison would be able to talk – he ought to have inquired how she was. He saw Kebble at his desk, looking young and very wide awake Kebble grinned and put a finger to his lips. For the first time Roger was aware of a third person in the room.

Sprawled back in the easy chair, mouth open, a faint snore coming rhythmically, was Dr Whales In a flash Roger remembered one thing that had slipped his mind, the autopsy report on Perce Sheldon; that seemed to belong to an earlier age.

'Has he reported?' asked Roger, quietly.

'Sheldon died of digitalis poisoning,' Kebble stated. 'It was almost certainly from an injection in the right buttock.'

Roger said: 'So now we know. Anything in about Doreen Morrison?'

'She's under sedation. The Divisional Surgeon thinks she'll be able to talk tomorrow. She's not injured or harmed physically, and she's had plenty to eat, he says.' Kebble was looking at Roger as if puzzled.

'Good,' Roger said. 'Hong Kong?'

'The call should be through any minute.' Kebble paused, and then asked: 'Care for a drink, sir?'

'Do I look as if I need it?'

'*I* do,' Kebble said, rather awkwardly.

'Help yourself and pour me a double.' Roger sat on the corner of his own desk, looking down at Whales. 'Jessup killed himself,' he announced unemotionally.

Kebble drew in a long, hissing breath, as if suffering from

physical pain. He didn't speak; he had a gift for knowing when not to. He handed Roger a whisky and soda; he hadn't spared the whisky. Roger drank. Whales snored. Kebble sipped. Roger moved slowly and held his glass under Whales's nose. Whales's snore became brisker. His lips and nostrils twitched. Roger didn't move. The pathologist stirred, and his eyes flickered open He squinted down at the glass, then hoisted himself back in his chair.

'Don't tempt me,' he said. 'When it sends me to sleep, I've had enough.'

'Sure?'

'Yes,' said Whales. He gave an involuntary shiver. 'Bloody cold in here. Had the report?'

'Yes, thanks.'

'Got a nice job on your hands, you have,' said Whales. 'Do something for me.'

'Yes, gladly.'

The flabby man grinned.

'No one quite like Handsome West,' he said, glancing at Kebble. 'Never has been, never will be. "Yes" he says although I might ask him for the moon. Send a driver to take me home, Roger.'

'Fix it, will you?' Roger asked Kebble.

When both men had gone, five minutes later, he sat on the arm of the big chair. Big Ben, sounding very loud on the quiet night, began to chime the hour. It was midnight, and this case hadn't really got under way until four o'clock this afternoon. He stretched, stood up, went to the window, and looked out at the lights of Westminster Bridge, lights from the old-fashioned lamps reflecting on the calm water on the Thames Big Ben had a yellow glow, like a sickly man in the moon The shape of the clock tower showed dark against the starlit sky; so did the shape of the rest of the Houses of Parliament.

*Mother* of Parliaments.

A telephone bell rang He turned quickly, Parliament forgotten, this might be the Hong Kong call He stepped towards the telephone as his door opened and Kebble appeared. Roger felt an impulse to wave to Kebble to take the call, but changed his mind. He lifted the receiver.

'Your call to Police Headquarters in Hong Kong, sir,' the operator said.

'Hong Kong,' Roger whispered to Kebble, who went across to pick up an extension. 'Put me through '

'It's Superintendent Hodges on the line, sir.'

Roger's heart leapt, for Hodges had once been a member of the Metropolitan Force. It was always helpful to speak to an old friend.

'Fred?' he said, a little too loudly.

'Hi, Handsome.' Hodges sounded as clear as if he were in London 'You must be in serious trouble to spend money like water on telephone calls.'

'That's right,' Roger said 'Do you know anything about the death of a man – a ship's officer named Sanderson, of the SS *Kookaburra*?'

There was hardly a moment's pause.

'Yes, I know plenty about it,' Hodges answered. 'He was killed on the way back to his ship, knocked over the head, we thought, and pushed into the harbour near the Star Ferry It took us three days to discover that he died of an injection of digitalis. We haven't a clue as to who did it, or why Don't say you have.'

Roger hesitated before he said: 'I haven't, Fred, but I've two victims of the same poisoning here – passengers off the same ship. I don't like it much, do you?'

'My God I don't!' With hardly a pause, Hodges went on: 'We'll split our sides here to try to find the killer. And I'll air-mail you a full report today. Anything else?'

'Not yet,' Roger said, almost awkwardly.

'Don't let it get you down,' Hodges cracked. 'See you one of these fine days, I hope.'

'Next time you're on leave, come and spend a night or two at Bell Street,' Roger invited.

When he rang off, he sat very still for some time. Kebble didn't move Finally Roger looked across at him, raised his hands, and let them flop on to the desk.

'So there's another murderer as well as our missing man.'

'Obviously no one who was on that ship is safe.' Kebble spoke

dispassionately, but nothing could take the cold horror out of his words.

'We'd better cable the Sydney Bureau,' Roger said. 'Tell 'em as much of the story as we can in a cable.' He picked up a pencil. 'Then we'd better get home.'

'Like me to word the cable?' Kebble offered.

'If I don't like the wording in the morning, I'd rather blame myself,' Roger said He forced a smile. 'You now see the rewards of promotion, don't you?'

Kebble said quietly: 'Yes, sir, I see the reward of being on top of your job.'

It was half past one when Roger turned the car into Bell Street, Chelsea, and then parked in front of the garage by the side of the house. The gates were open but the garage doors shut, neither of his sons had thought to open them for him. The late teens was a forgetful age He pulled up within an inch of the doors, irritated, and walked on the grass alongside a concrete path to the back of the house. The back door was locked. He used his own key, making as little noise as he could. Although Janet slept at the front, trifling sounds disturbed her when he was not home. He switched on the light. On the kitchen table was a dish of sandwiches inside a plastic bag, instant coffee already in a cup, cream by its side He lit the gas under the kettle He had not realized he was so hungry until he tucked in. By the time the kettle was boiling, only one sandwich was left and his mood was already better.

The passage floor creaked.

The sound reminded Roger vividly of the creaking door at the house in Notting Hill Gate He started, and stared at the door, which was ajar. It moved under gentle pressure, and Richard's dark head appeared. Richard was a year younger than his brother, two inches taller, much more slender. His eyes looked huge with tiredness.

'Hi, Dad.'

'What's the matter with sleep tonight?'

'I've been reading.'

'Until *this* hour?'

'Jolly good book.' Richard came farther in. He wore a suit of pale-blue pyjamas, much mended, gaping open to reveal a tanned chest. 'True crime and all that. Had any luck?'

'My luck's right out,' Roger answered. 'Someone forgot to open the garage for me.'

'Oh, damn!' Richard looked really contrite. 'I knew there was something I meant to do. Sorry.'

Roger's exasperation vanished.

'Try to remember, old chap.'

'Yes, of course.' Richard went to a bowl of fruit on the kitchen table, picked off a few green grapes, and ate them one by one. 'I mean, about that girl in the paper – Scoop was talking about it just before he went to sleep. Is it going to be one of the big cases?'

'I wouldn't be surprised,' Roger admitted.

'Beastly swine.' Richard's vehemence made his lean cheeks flush and his tired eyes spark. 'The devil who did it, I mean. What makes a man a murderer, Dad?' When Roger didn't answer at once, the lad went on: 'I mean, could it happen to me? Could I be one?' When Roger still didn't answer Richard went on with a kind of restrained vigour: 'I mean, people say "there for the grace of God but go I". Does it really mean every one of us is a killer at heart, only we don't all get the chance?'

It was nearly two o'clock, and even with a whole evening in front of him, Roger wouldn't have found it easy to answer those impassioned questions satisfactorily. Yet to make light of it, to be casual or uninterested, would not only be cruel but might discourage his son from asking questions of vital importance to them both.

'I don't think it means that,' Roger said at last. 'I don't think all human beings are potential murderers. I do think there are some with a bad streak in them, and others who learn to be callous. Can you kill and skin a rabbit?'

'You know I can.'

'Can Scoop?'

Richard frowned, drawing his dark eyebrows together.

'He hates it if anyone kills a rabbit or anything near him.'

'So there's something different in your make-up People have such differences to a greater or lesser degree. The murderer with a bad streak is at one end of the scale. The boy who hates killing by hunting is at the other. Most of us are somewhere in between. Does that make it clearer?'

'I suppose so,' Richard conceded 'I'm still a bit confused, though. Do you mean that because I can kill a rabbit and Scoop can't, I'm closer to being a murderer than he is?'

Roger almost groaned.

'No, I don't.' He drank his coffee slowly. 'I don't think this is the right end of the day to try to explain, but —'

'No, it isn't, and you look fagged out. I might be clearer on it in the morning, anyhow.' Richard flashed a smile. 'I hope so, anyway! 'Night, Dad. Sorry about the garage doors.'

He went off.

Roger felt strangely light-hearted when he went upstairs; Richard had done him a world of good. He crept into his bedroom. Light from a street lamp showed Janet in the middle of the bed, dark hair against white pillow, both arms and shoulders covered. She did not stir as he got undressed, but when he was in bed beside her, she moved her warm, soft body against his, and said with unexpected clarity:

'Have you got to get up early?'

'Not too early.'

'That's good,' she said, and was asleep again in a few seconds.

Roger lay for a while, anxiety and fears for other people drawn out of him. Soon, he fell asleep He did not dream. He was not aware of Janet getting up, just after seven o'clock, of the boys talking outside the room, or of the other noises of the house or of the street. He lay sleeping in this bright room, their bedroom ever since they had married, and the first thing to disturb him was the harsh note of the telephone; it had been switched through to the bedroom, as it always was by night, and Janet had forgotten to switch it back to the main instrument downstairs. There was a clatter of footsteps before the bell stopped ringing here, although he could hear the less strident noise downstairs.

He shifted over and picked up this extension.

'. . . must you wake him? He was in so late.'

Kebble's voice was unmistakable.

'I'm sure he would want to be called, Mrs West.'

'Oh, all right.' Janet wasn't pleased, and did not hesitate to make it obvious. 'Wait a minute.' She let the telephone clatter and hurried to the foot of the stairs. 'Scoop!' she called. 'Wake your father and tell him Detective Sergeant Kebble says he must speak to him urgently.'

'Right, Mum!' Almost at once, the door opened and Martin-called-Scoopy came in, broad face bright with excitement, broad, solid, eager. 'Dad —'

Roger turned his head and winked.

'Oh, he's *awake*,' Martin called down, in a tone of mock disgust. He advanced into the room as Roger waved the receiver.

'Yes, Kebble?'

'Sorry to disturb you, sir,' Kebble said. 'I thought you ought to know that there is a telephone call coming through from Sydney, New South Wales, at half past eight. That's half past six in the evening, their time. It's in response to your cable. Will you take the call at home, sir, or come to the office?'

The clock on Roger's bedside table pointed to five minutes to eight; so there was just time to get to the Yard.

## 9

# Call From Australia

MARTIN-CALLED-SCOOPY'S eyes were as huge as Richard's had been the previous night, with a kind of earnest appeal, as if he divined the significance of the question. There were quiet footsteps on the stairs, and Janet appeared, hair wavy but tidy, without make-up except for a little lipstick, eyes bright with anxiety which she sensed rather than understood.

'*You're going to have a good breakfast!*' she whispered. 'You can't work on an empty stomach.'

Roger found himself grinning.

'Have it put through here, Keb, will you?'

'Right you are.' If Kebble felt disappointed, he kept any trace of it out of his voice. 'I'll fix it with the overseas operator. They didn't say who would call – the operator just said Sydney Criminal Investigation Bureau.'

'With a bit of luck it will be Luke Shaw,' Roger said. 'What are you doing up so bright and early?'

'I got in at half past seven, seeing that it was bound to be a busy day.'

'Had breakfast?'

'No, just a cuppa —'

'Go and have a good one,' Roger said. He was smiling at Janet, who had come farther into the room. 'You can't work on an empty stomach.'

'Er – right, sir.' Kebble sounded bewildered.

'Thanks for calling,' Roger said, and rang off.

Janet said: 'Beast,' but came across, sat on the side of the bed and looked down at Roger, as if looking for some tell-tale sign. 'You don't look as if you were up all night, I must say. Scoop, go and make some tea, and —'

'Char coming up!' That was Richard, from the stairs.

'I don't know what you two think you're going to worm out of me this morning,' Roger said. 'It's a hundred to one you won't succeed. There's a call from Sydney, Australia, coming through in half an hour. Run a bath for me, Scoop. Go down and check the car levels, Fish.'

'Any orders for me?' demanded Janet.

Roger squeezed her hand.

'There's no time,' he said, wickedly. 'I'll be ready for that hearty meal at about a quarter to nine, though.'

It was eight thirty-one; no call had come.

It was eight forty-one; no call had come.

'I'm beginning to think you might wait for an hour. I'll cook your eggs,' Janet said. 'You boys ought to be on your way.' They were rising twenty and rising nineteen, but still 'you boys' to Janet, particularly when she was preoccupied.

Martin was studying at an art school, not far away from Bell Street. Richard, longing for the day when he would be able to

join a television company, the dream of his life, worked at a West End bookshop.

'If you don't go now you'll be late,' Janet said. 'No, Scoop, don't make me cross. I —'

The telephone bell rang. Roger strolled towards the main instrument, which was in the hall just outside the kitchen door. Roger lifted it, feeling that he was dramatizing a long-distance call simply because it impressed the boys. There was something else; a sense of foreboding, or at least of disquiet. Sydney could not have received the cable more than three or four hours ago. What made it so urgent for them to telephone halfway across the world so soon?

'This is Superintendent West of New Scotland Yard.'

'Are you expecting a call from Sydney, Australia, caller?'

'Yes.'

'Hold on, please.'

Roger waited for what seemed a long time, and the others fussed and fidgeted about him, Janet pretending to be very busy in the kitchen. Suddenly a man said clearly:

'Mr West?'

'Speaking,' Roger said carefully.

'Good on you, Handsome!' The voice was loud, vigorous, unmistakably Australian. 'How are things going with you?'

Roger smiled broadly.

'I'm fine, Luke. And you?'

'Never better, Handsome, never better!' Luke Shaw, who had been on a tour of Scotland Yard only two years before, was now Senior Superintendent in the Sydney CIB He spoke as if he had never heard of a cable, and had all the time in the world. 'How's that lovely wife of yours?'

'Wonderful!'

'You've said it, she always was.' It was easy to imagine Shaw's big, broad face and beaming smile. 'It's a good thing she is, because in every other way you like trouble, don't you?'

'Kookaburra trouble?' asked Roger.

'My word, yes. I can tell you all about it if you'll fly here and see me.'

Roger was astonished enough to exclaim:

'Stop fooling!'

'I'm not fooling,' Luke Shaw declared. A hint of laughter vanished from his voice. 'Do you remember a ship called the SS *Koala*?'

'Should I?'

'Yes,' said Shaw. 'You certainly should What happened to that could also happen to the *Kooka*.' He halved the name abruptly. 'Take it from me, Handsome, the only way for you to finish this job properly is to come out here.'

'I don't think there's a ghost of a chance,' Roger hedged. 'At the moment I can't even see any reason. We've arrested one man who —'

'This Jessup – what's he like?' interrupted Shaw, and then began to answer his own question. 'Five feet six, thin dark hair, pale face, very dark eyes, small mouth —'

'How the devil do you know?'

'Hold it, Handsome. Or is he six feet one, very big with a swarthy, pitted face? Which one?'

'The five foot six one,' Roger answered in a subdued voice.

'He's no more Jessup than you're Luke Shaw He's Paul Barring. The big man is his brother, Marcus. There's a third brother – Solomon. It's a hell of a long story, that's why I say that the best chance you've got of learning it is to come to Sydney.' Shaw's voice boomed over the telephone.

'Why don't you come here?' countered Roger.

'Not a hope. Wouldn't do much good if I did. You need to know the background, get all the details, see all the records. Have a go, Handsome. You could do with some sunshine, couldn't you? If you need something to twist the arm of your boss, remind him that the *Kookaburra*'s nearer Australia than it is England, and when she docks you can start asking all the right questions.' After a pause, he went on: 'That is, if she docks. Her sister ship didn't make it.'

That was the moment when Roger remembered what had happened to the SS *Koala*.

He did not speak at once; shock ran through his body, making him cold and still. He was not aware of Janet and the boys staring at him, touched by the tension which this recollection brought to him He did not hear Richard say, whispering:

'What do you think's happened?'

In Roger's mind's eye there was a picture so vivid, so hideous in its wastage of human life, that he felt as if the breath had been drawn out of his body and he could not move or speak.

'So you get the angle,' Luke Shaw said finally.

Roger gulped.

'Yes, I've remembered what happened to the SS *Koala* She went down off the coast of Queensland a year or two ago with a loss of eighty-one passengers and twenty-odd crew. There were only a few survivors. Am I right?'

'My word you're right!' Shaw's voice seemed to vibrate in Roger's ear. 'Know what worries me, Handsome? The same thing could happen to *Kookaburra*. She's got twelve cabin passengers, eighty-seven steerage, mostly Chinese from Hong Kong, and a crew of twenty-eight. And let me tell you something The two Barring brothers were among the survivors of the *Koala*. They'd had their own line but were bought up by Blue Flag, after being driven almost out of business There was a lot of bad blood between the Barrings and Blue Flag, and we've had an eye on the Barrings for some time but couldn't get anything on them. You've got plenty on one. What about the other?'

'If he's the man I think he is, he's loose in London,' Roger stated.

'After killing two passengers, eh? Let me tell you something else Solomon Barring was in Hong Kong when the *Kookaburra* was berthed there. Funny thing about Neil Sanderson's death, wasn't it? Handsome, if you can put the darbies on Marcus Barring, every policeman in New South Wales will drink your health. I'll put a detailed report on the first jet from the Kingsford Smith Airport this morning. Cable or call me with any news, won't you?'

'I will. Luke, have you any positive evidence that the *Kookaburra* might be in danger?'

'No,' answered Shaw. 'Just a nasty feeling. See you, Handsome.'

He rang off, as if he was anxious to leave Roger to think on the situation.

Roger put the receiver down slowly, then ran his fingers

through his hair. He was oblivious of the others until Richard broke the silence.

'How bad is it, Dad?'

Roger frowned, looked at them all, forced a smile, and answered:

'I should know before the night's out.' It was really no answer at all, and it would not have surprised him had Richard tried to force the issue. A noise at the front door broke the tension; a newspaper appeared in the letter-box. Janet moved back to the kitchen, saying:

'Get the paper for your father, Richard Breakfast in ten minutes, Roger. Scoop, you won't learn to be an artist by standing and gaping like that.' She bustled about and set them all bustling, but the relief from tension did not last for long – hardly long enough for Roger to begin to digest the fact that Luke Shaw and the Sydney Police had no doubt of the enormity of the danger in this situation. He needed time to think, to absorb facts, to acquire more facts.

Could he do that, here in England? The first vague hope of a trip to Australia formed in his mind.

'Hey, look!' Richard broke the pipe dream. 'Pop's hit the front page again.'

Frying eggs, art school, and a bookshop were all forgotten as Richard came rushing along the passage, eyes blazing, *Daily Globe* spread out in his hands. Janet and Martin closed on him. All three read the headlines and then the story of what had happened last night, and saw the photographs of Roger and Doreen Morrison, with an inset picture of her dead sister.

'You saved her life,' Richard said, humbly

'He could easily have lost his own,' said Janet, acidly. She turned on her heel and stamped back to the stove.

Roger saw the over-solemn look in the eyes of both boys, felt a moment's unease because there was no doubt of the hero-worship in them He waved them away with a shooing motion of his hands, then tiptoed towards Janet The boys went out the front way. Roger slid his arms round Janet's waist as she cracked an egg on the side of the frying-pan.

'No, I'm serious,' she said, still sharp-voiced. 'Why does it always have to be you risking your life?'

'Lots of others do it. You just happen to notice me,' Roger replied. He squeezed more tightly, and put his cheek against hers. 'Would you have liked me to let her die?'

'Don't be a fool, of course I wouldn't ' Janet tipped the pan to let the boiling fat spread over the eggs, then turned round swiftly, taking his arms, gripping them. 'Roger, every time something like this happens I feel scared in case – in case it's the last time your luck will hold.'

She meant every word she said.

He leaned forward and kissed her.

'You're all the luck I need,' he said gently.

Tears filled her eyes for a moment, she sniffed and pulled herself free. Before he left, half an hour later, she was brisker and brighter, but he knew she hadn't really recovered from her mood of fear.

Kebble was in the office. The morning post and reports had been sorted out and were in neat piles on Roger's desk. A third pile, of small pieces of paper, was of notes of telephone calls. Roger put his hat on a peg, and loosened his collar and tie. It was a bright, pleasant but chilly morning.

'Tired of life as a detective sergeant, are you?' Roger asked. 'Prefer a desk of your own?'

Kebble grinned.

'As soon as you think I'm ready for it.'

'You'll do.' Roger dropped into his chair. 'Did you get a tape of the talk I had with Sydney?'

'Yes, and I've listened to it. It's being transcribed now.' Kebble, suddenly serious, reminded Roger of his own two sons. 'How well do you know Superintendent Shaw, sir?'

'He's no scaremonger. You can take him at his word.' Roger picked up the first telephone messages. The Commander CID wanted to see him. The laboratory had diagnosed the contents of the broken hypodermic needle as a concentrated solution of digitalis. Lancelot Smith of the Blue Flag Line had telephoned twice, but would leave no message. There were several other messages, none to do with the *Kookaburra* case. The news editor of the *Globe* had called twice.

'Anything in about the man who escaped from me last night?' Roger asked.

'He's not been caught,' Kebble said. 'He shared a room downstairs in the same house with the dead man. He gave his name as Jessup, too. Looks as if he really is the Marcus Barring Sydney talked about The knife is of Australian make, probably used for wood carving Some odd pieces of wood and some shavings were found in the room. They'd been at the house for four weeks The two Morrison girls had that room you saw, and Denise went away about two weeks ago According to the landlady, Doreen stayed on because she believed her sister would come back. Doreen hardly ever went out. The landlady is one of the "ask no questions and you'll hear no lies" kind. The Division will have another go at her, but they think she's the type who doesn't care what happens provided she gets her rent.'

The type wasn't uncommon.

'If necessary we'll talk to the lady herself,' Roger said. 'Any news of Doreen Morrison?'

'She should be able to talk this afternoon,' Kebble answered. 'There's a report on Limm, too. He's still in London.'

Roger's telephone rang before he could ponder that information, and he lifted the receiver at once.

'There's a Mr Lancelot Smith on the line,' the operator said.

'I'll talk to him.'

'Just a moment, sir.'

It was only a moment, and when Smith spoke it was as if he had been stemming a flood of words but now they were released nothing could hold them back.

'Superintendent, I tried to call you earlier, I have some news which was not in my possession last night. About the passengers who were on the *Kookaburra*, I mean. Mr and Mrs Parrish rejoined the ship at Marseilles. They are still on board and due to disembark at Sydney in ten days' time. I have Mr and Mrs Donelli's address. They have just written to inquire about sailings back to Sydney. They are in Naples, living with a married daughter. I have no trace, no trace at all of Mr Samuel Hackett, but I understood he would move about the Continent with no set plan I do know that he intended to visit Scandinavia and Germany as well as Switzerland because he asked us for

information about those places. We referred him to Thomas Cook's nearest office. Can you – can *you* trace him, sir? After what I see in the newspapers this morning about the attempt to kill Miss Doreen Morrison, I feel that there is no end to the danger, no end at all.'

The spate of words dried up.

'Mr Smith,' said Roger,' why didn't you tell me that the third officer was really Paul Barring, not Jessup? And do you know where I can find his brother Marcus?'

## 10

# Admission

'NO, I'VE NO idea where Marcus Barring is,' Lancelot Smith declared. He sat in Roger's office, an hour after the telephone call, looking as heavy and gross-featured as he had the previous night, and tired as if he had not slept. 'I did not know for certain that they were the Barrings. The Captain of the *Kookaburra* had no idea, either. Both men left the ship at Southampton, and one of the crew said he thought they were two of the Barring brothers. I didn't know, Superintendent.'

Roger was stony-eyed.

'Was the taller brother accused of theft?'

'No He was ship's carpenter and handyman, not an officer. He told the first officer that he was leaving the ship as a protest because of the charges of theft made against his brother.'

'Why didn't you tell me about the loss of the *Koala*?' Roger demanded.

'I wondered if I should. I did indeed. But I wavered between loyalty to my employers and – and my duty to the police. I did not wish to revive the old stories, the old scandals. The Barrings always believed their company had been ruined by the Blue Flag line, and – but it is a long, long story. I know only a little of it. I sent a long cable to my owners in Sydney last night

asking permission to give you all details. I expect a reply to-day. Even so I cannot see that I have done any harm, Mr West.'

'I hope you haven't,' Roger said bleakly. 'Have you the Donellis' address?'

'Yes.' Smith took a slip of paper from his pocket.

'Thanks. I'll do all I can to protect them,' Roger promised. 'I don't yet know what I can do about the Parrishes. Is there anything else you can tell me about Samuel Hackett?'

'I only wish there were,' Smith said.

Old Sam Hackett seemed to be having the time of his life in Paris A man was only as old as his hopes, and Paris gave him a lot to hope for. The few acquaintances he had made, the staff at the little hotel near the Madeleine where he was staying, and the quite attractive 'girl' in her middle thirties who had a soft spot for the old man who was so delighted she was ready to share her divan with him, all felt sure that he had entered a new lease of life.

Lancelot Smith had been gone for an hour. Roger had read through all the reports Limm had gone to a theatre the previous night, by himself, and gone to his hotel, also by himself. A general call had gone out to all Divisions, Home Counties forces, and all ports and airports for a man answering Solomon Barring's description; no photograph of Barring was available.

Roger went along to see his chief, Commander Hardy, a man whom he had known for many years, who had risen from the ranks, and who was still not always easy in the seat of authority. It was seldom possible to be absolutely sure whether he would approve or disapprove of any action taken. Spread over his desk were the morning newspapers, with the *Globe* prominent among them.

'Good morning,' Roger said.

Hardy grunted.

' 'Morning. Any further developments on this digitalis job?'

'Nothing good or worth worrying you about.'

'It all worries me,' Hardy said 'The New South Wales people seem to think it might be connected with the loss of a ship two years ago. Can you see any connection between a ship which

foundered in the Pacific Ocean and a madman running around killing people in London?'

'Madman?' Roger echoed.

'That's what he looks like to me. Very bad thing that Jessup – alias Barring – killed himself. Can't blame you for that but someone will try to sooner or later. Worried about the other passengers?'

'Very.'

'So am I,' said Hardy. 'Especially those in this country. Drop anything else you're doing and concentrate on this, Handsome. You have *carte blanche*.' He gave a wintry smile 'Not too many heroics, though. If I had to choose between having you alive or these other people alive I'd settle for you '

He nodded dismissal Roger, who hadn't sat down, felt curiously deflated; Hardy in some moods had that effect. Hardy's telephone rang, and Roger went out. By the time he was back in his office, he was feeling more satisfied. He had a free hand and could concentrate on the *Kookaburra* case; only now did he realize how much he wanted to do that The feeling of disquiet which had been in his mind from the beginning of the case was as strong as ever. It was not only because one of the Barrings was loose in London, likely to kill again; it was something he could not quite grasp, a feeling that there was a hidden factor which he should be able to see but could not.

Kebble was talking on the telephone. Roger picked up a new note from his own desk. it read:

*Doreen M came round at 11.45 am.*

He picked up his own telephone, and called the Yard's chief liaison with Interpol.

'Yep?' The other superintendent liked talking in monosyllables.

'Jay, I want to find an elderly Australian, named Hackett, who is somewhere in Europe having a good time. He was on the *Kookaburra*, and —'

'Wondered when you'd want some help on that,' the other interrupted. 'Any idea where the old geezer is?'

'I'll send a note of all I've got. And there's a Mr and Mrs Donelli —' Roger gave a brief description of the Donellis, and

went on: 'Try to persuade the Naples police that this is serious, will you?'

'They won't take much convincing.'

'Thanks.' Roger rang off, to find Kebble off his telephone and making notes. 'Got all that?' Kebble, scribbling, nodded. 'Give Interpol everything we've got,' Roger said. 'I'm going to see the Morrison girl.'

Hardy had in fact done him good. He felt fit and more confident as he ran down the Yard's steps, and across to his car. The presentiment was forgotten. A CID woman was by Doreen's bedside, and would take notes; he could drive himself. The sun warmed him Blessedly, there was no interference from the Yard by radio. He found a parking space almost opposite the nursing home where the girl had been taken; it was one used a great deal by the Yard, and the atmosphere was conducive to interviews with witnesses. He wondered how much Doreen knew or would tell him, then realized belatedly that he would probably have to break the news of her sister's death. He saw a man coming down the four steps which led from the front door.

It was Benjamin Limm, the first man to identify Denise Morrison. He was glowering, and did not recognize Roger at first

'Good morning,' Roger said.

Limm started back, and recognition dawned. He stopped squarely in front of Roger, as if spoiling for a fight.

'You've no right to keep Miss Morrison here against her will.'

'How did you know where to find her?' Roger demanded.

'I asked the *Globe*. They gave me a hell of a lot of trouble. Bloody pommies,' Limm went on raspingly. 'She wants to get out of this goddammed country, the quicker the better. And if you try to stop her I'll see the High Commissioner. If necessary I'll fly home and see the Prime Minister.'

'Take it easy,' Roger said. 'No one wants to keep anyone here against his will Have you seen her?'

'Yes.'

'How did you get in?'

'I said I was a relation, and they let me in. She looks awful. All she wants to do is get out of this country —'

'Yes, you said that before,' Roger interrupted. 'It might have

been as well if you and the others had not come in the first place, there's no profit in the export of murder.' That stopped Limm in full flood. 'I'm going to see her. If you're in a better mood when I come out we might talk. Like to sit and wait in my car?'

Limm, still nonplussed, asked: 'How long will you be?'

'Half an hour or so.'

'I'll come back.'

'Limm,' Roger said, 'did you know the ship's carpenter on the *Kookaburra,* a man who called himself Marcus Jessup?' Limm caught his breath. 'What about him?'

'He may be after your life,' Roger said. 'Keep your eye open for him.'

He left Limm standing A man across the road raised a newspaper; he was the Yard man watching Limm, there was little danger. Roger went up to the front door. A young girl opened it, an elderly woman came to escort him up to Doreen Morrison's room Even halfway up the stairs the sound of shouting, with an unmistakable note of hysteria, was audible.

'She was very excitable soon after she woke,' the Sister said. 'And the visit from her cousin made her much worse.'

'Does she know about her sister?' Roger asked.

'Yes – *he* told her.'

'Oh, did he,' Roger said heavily. 'No wonder she was worse.'

The Sister opened the door of a room on the right. It was small and rather gloomy, with light coming only from one small window set high in the wall. A nurse was holding Doreen's hands, the CID woman was standing in a corner, looking on. Her expression seemed to say: 'Leave her to me, I'll knock the nonsense out of her.'

Roger's impression of the girl was very different from what he had expected. The hysteria had put glowing red into Doreen's cheeks, and made her blue eyes spark and glitter. She looked quite lovely.

'I don't want to stay here. I want to go back home. I don't care what you say. I hate it here!' She leaned forward and glared at Roger. 'Perhaps *you* can make them see sense!' she cried.

'Perhaps you'll see some sense yourself when you know that

this man saved your life last night – and saved it twice.' The CID woman looked and spoke like a severe headmistress. 'Why he should risk his own to save yours God only knows. *I* don't.'

Doreen Morrison stopped glaring, stopped trying to free herself from the nurse's restraining hands. She sat quite upright, still very lovely even though the colour faded from her cheeks and the fire in her eyes slowly died.

Roger smiled gently.

'Hallo, Miss Morrison. I'm glad to see you looking better.' He moved forward and shook hands; and when he went on his voice was pitched very low. 'And I am desperately sorry about your sister.'

Doreen's eyes filled with tears She sat there, clutching Roger's right hand, gulping, trying to fight back a gust of crying. But she could not She leaned forward against Roger, sobbing desperately, piteously. No one seemed to move, although the paroxysm seemed to last for a long time.

At last, the tears slackened. Soon, she eased her body away from Roger's, and looked round as if for a handkerchief The nurse had a towel handy. Doreen dabbed her swollen, reddened eyes, sniffed, tried to speak, failed, and tried again.

'I do want to go home,' she said miserably 'I can't stand it in England without Denise. I really can't. Help me, please help me.'

Very quietly, Roger said: 'When you've told us everything you can and given us the help we need, you can go home That's a promise.'

It took some time for the import of what he said to register. Then radiance lighted up those reddened eyes, before they filled with tears again.

Soon, she asked: 'How long must I stay here?'

'Not very long.'

'A day? A week? A month?'

'Less than a week, if all goes well,' Roger said. 'I'm going to ask you just one question, then I've work to do while you tell the detective-sergeant here all you can.'

She nodded. 'What's the question?' she asked.

'How well do you know Ben Limm?'

'Not – not really well. He was on the *Kookaburra*. Denise – Denise liked him a lot.'

'Did he like her?'

'I – I think so. I think he liked us both.'

'Have you met him since you left the ship?'

'We had lunch the first day ashore, that's all,' Doreen answered.

'Are you sure?'

'Of course I'm sure.'

'Did your sister meet him in London?'

'Only at that lunch. She would have told me. I —' Doreen broke off and put her hands up in front of her face, as if to fend off some physical thing 'She might have met him after she went away. I don't know. She was away so long '

'Did you ever know a man named Brown – a friend of Denise?'

'No,' Doreen said. 'No, I didn't ' There was new tension in her as she leaned forward again. 'Why – why did you ask me about Ben? He's got nothing to do with this – he can't have.'

That was the moment when Roger realized that the girl was in love with Benjamin Limm.

## 11

## Girl in Anger

BENJAMIN LIMM CAME striding along the pavement, a picture of restrained aggression, as Roger left the nursing home. The Yard man tailing the Australian was at the corner. Roger half expected to be greeted truculently, but instead Limm was surprisingly mild mannered.

'How is she?'

'No worse,' Roger said. 'I want to talk to you. Get in my car.' He went to the door and opened it. After a moment's hesitation Limm got in. Roger sat next to him. Before starting the engine he flicked on the radio.

'This is Superintendent West,' he said to Information. 'I want inquiries made at the *Globe* to find out whether anyone on the paper told a Mr Benjamin Limm where to find Miss Doreen Morrison —'

'I can save you time,' Limm interpolated. 'I saw the deputy news editor.'

'Try the deputy news editor first,' Roger went on.

Information said: 'Right away, sir. Will you talk to Detective Sergeant Kebble?'

'Yes.'

'One moment, please.'

After at least a minute, Kebble came on the line. All the time Limm stared intently at Roger, without attempting to speak.

'I had a message from Lancelot Smith,' Kebble said without preamble. 'He confirms that a supply of digitalis in capsule form was on the *Kookaburra* It was for a passenger two trips earlier, and the surplus was never removed from the Medical Cupboard.'

'Another nail,' Roger said. 'Anything else?'

'A man answering Marcus Barring alias Jessup's description left London Airport on the 1015 flight to Düsseldorf and places East,' answered Kebble. 'He had a ticket through to Sydney but said he wanted to break his journey at Düsseldorf and Hong Kong. He had one suitcase, and his ticket was booked under the name of Brown.'

'Brown!' ejaculated Roger. 'The name Denise Morrison was registered under when she was found. What time does the plane leave Düsseldorf?'

'Twelve-ten,' answered Kebble. 'I've asked the Superintendent in Interpol to find out if he left the aircraft at Dusseldorf.'

'Where's the next stop?'

'Istanbul, at about six o'clock, then Teheran about ten. I've briefed the Superintendent.'

'Keep at it,' Roger said. 'More?'

'Not yet!'

'Take these notes, I keep forgetting them,' Roger said. 'Have a memo written to the department and the Division concerned. The switchboard operator on duty last night – the one who took the call from Doreen Morrison – was too excitable, but

very quick. She wants to be calmed down a bit, nicely. The policeman who saved me from a lot of trouble at Notting Hill ought to get a commendation. And make a note for me to have a word with him some time.'

Almost at once, Kebble said: 'His name was Harris, C. P. Harris. I'll fix it, sir.'

'Good,' said Roger. 'I should be back in half an hour and I may or may not have Benjamin Limm with me. I've promised Doreen Morrison I will take her statement personally, some time this evening.'

'Right.'

'That's all,' Roger said.

'Don't go, Super,' put in another man on the line, 'I've had a word with the deputy editor of the *Globe* He did give that address to Limm One of the *Globe* reporters should have been waiting when Limm left, but he was sent on to a smash-and-grab in Oxford Street.'

'That'll be a relief to one man, anyhow. Thanks.' Roger switched off and looked at Limm. 'The *Globe* corroborated for you.'

'The only thing that surprises me is you were so quick.'

'We don't lose more time than we have to,' Roger said. 'Limm, do you know anything at all you haven't told us? Anything at all unusual which took place on the *Kookaburra*, for instance.'

'No,' answered Limm quietly. 'I didn't see anyone – Denise or Doreen included – later than I told you. The last time was the lunch on the day we reached England. That's what you mean, isn't it?'

'I mean is there anything more you can tell us of any kind about the voyage.'

'There was one thing,' Limm said reflectively 'Jessup, who killed himself in his cell, was an officer on board. He was caught in passengers' cabins twice, and confined to his quarters on the last stage of the journey. I thought the shipping company would charge him with theft, but all they seem to have done was to fire him.'

'Did he steal anything?'

'He had old Sam Hackett's wallet, crammed with currency, in his quarters. The old man was very decent about it. I happened to share a cabin with him and knew what was going on.'

'Did Hackett tell you where he was going?' Roger was now weaving his way through the West End traffic, yet seemed oblivious of its complexity.

'He said he was going to go everywhere and do everything.' Limm laughed. 'He's a high-stepping old boy, and he's got no one to leave his money to. He didn't care how much he spent. He didn't go into any details, though.'

'If you think of any chance remark, anything which might give us a clue about where to find him, let us know at once,' Roger said.

'Think he's on the list?' asked Limm heavily.

'He could be,' Roger said. 'You could be, too. I'd have a lot more questions to ask any *Kookaburra* passenger who isn't on the list. As far as you know could anything which happened on board explain what is happening now?'

Without hesitation, Limm answered: 'Absolutely nothing.'

They were in St James's Park now, nearing the Horse Guards Parade. Roger was silent for a minute or two, and Limm was about to speak when he said:

'Why this sudden interest in Doreen Morrison?'

'It's not all that sudden,' Limm answered gruffly. 'I always had a soft spot for her, but there was no hope of prising her from Denise, and I didn't try. Once I realized how she would feel over the murder, and what a mess she would be in, I had to try to help.'

Roger didn't speak.

'That's the simple truth,' Limm said awkwardly.

'I didn't question it.'

'You question everything,' Limm retorted, half angry, half admiring. 'What about Doreen? Can she go home?'

'I don't see why not With Paul Barring dead, we don't need her evidence of his attempt on her life. If her statement is straightforward and she undertakes to swear further depositions in Australia if required, I think it can be arranged. Sure you want to take her back?'

'Absolutely.'

'Give me your London address and I'll keep in touch,' said Roger. 'But stay away from her until I give the word, will you?'

'Oh, all right,' Limm promised. 'That right you're going to take her statement yourself?'

'Yes.'

'Quite the ladies' man, aren't you?' Limm half jeered.

When Roger reached the nursing home late that afternoon, Doreen was up and dressed, and looking much better Curiously she had lost something of her attractiveness. A younger woman CID officer was with her, and she gave Roger the impression that she was very pleased with herself.

'Miss Morrison has made a statement voluntarily, sir.'

'Oh,' said Roger. He half wished this hadn't happened, he knew more than the officer was ever likely to know about a witness's facial expressions when making a statement; but it was done now 'Let me see it.' As he took it he smiled at Doreen. 'Is there anything you've remembered since you made this?'

'No, nothing,' she answered.

Roger read the report, and within a few sentences his dissatisfaction with the CID woman vanished, she must have phrased this, and she hadn't wasted a word It read:

> I, Doreen May Morrison, of Adelaide, South Australia, an Australian citizen lawfully holding Passport Number 851972, make this statement voluntarily and of my own free will.
>
> On March 23rd of this year I reached Southampton on the *SS Kookaburra* after a journey from Australia which had lasted six weeks. I was with my sister, Denise. Our joint intention was to obtain work in England, to save sufficient money for a long tour of the Continent, and to return to Australia after twelve or eighteen months. At Southampton we were told by Jessup that we could obtain work at a certain office in London We knew that Jessup had been accused of theft on the ship, but he told us that this was unjustified, and that he had been in passengers' cabins looking for property of his own. He did not say what property I did not want to accept any favour from Jessup, but Denise was impressed by the salaries he said we were being offered – £20 sterling a week each – and we decided to go with him.

Jessup took us to a house in Notting Hill Gate, London, where the police afterwards found me. From the beginning the arrangement was unsatisfactory but for some reason that I never understood, Denise accepted it. I had an impression that she was influenced by Jessup's brother, Marcus, who had been one of the *Kookaburra*'s crew. We were told that the jobs had fallen through. I did some temporary work at garages in Hammersmith and Shepherd's Bush, and Denise obtained a part-time job as an assistant in a dress shop, but her work did not last long. I had reason to believe she was having an *affaire* with Marcus Jessup. The smaller brother, Paul, was extremely attentive to me, but I did not like him in spite of the fact that he (as well as his brother) appeared to have plenty of money. From time to time Paul Jessup asked me questions about how much I knew about him, and whether anyone on the ship had told us anything about him. I said no one had talked to me about him except after the thefts.

After two weeks, Denise left the rooms one morning, and did not come back. I did not see Marcus Jessup again after that, and believed they had gone off together. Paul told me that she would return. For a week I stayed at the rooms hoping she would. When I said that I would have to leave, Paul told me that I would never see Denise again unless I stayed there. Although he made frequent advances to me, he did not attempt to force himself on me. He promised me new clothes, jewellery, and anything I wanted if I would live with him I refused His questions about whether anyone had accused him of committing crimes became more and more insistent. I always told the truth, that no one had, but he did not appear to believe me.

One day (about five days before he made an attack on my life) I slept very heavily and when I came round I believed he had drugged me. From then on I was half dazed all the time. On one occasion I was awakened by a sharp pain in the arm, and saw Jessup holding a hypodermic syringe. I tried to get off the bed but he held me down until I lost consciousness. He kept telling me that if I didn't tell him what I knew about him I would never see Denise again. I woke up one afternoon, and he was not in the room. I dressed, although very tired, and went out. It was the first time I had been out of doors for nearly a week. I saw a newspaper on a hallstand downstairs, and picked it up. Denise's picture was on the front page. I knew something was badly wrong. I went to a telephone booth along the street and telephoned the number in the newspaper –

Scotland Yard. I spoke to a man who said he was Superintendent West. He told me to stay where I was until he came to fetch me. Paul Jessup arrived first, however. I was frightened of him but tried to run away. He overpowered me, and forced me to go back to the rooms. Then he pinned me to the bed with his knee while he picked up a hypodermic syringe. He kept saying it was my own fault, he didn't want to do it, but he had to. I believe he was going to kill me. Before he could give me the injection, however, another man arrived and stopped him. I was afterwards told that this man was Superintendent West. I remember nothing else until I woke up in a strange room. I was told that this was in a small nursing home, often used by the police. I know of nothing else relevant to this statement.

Roger was aware of the girl staring at him; and of the CID woman's gaze, as if in hopes of quick approval.

'Very concise,' Roger said. 'Just one or two questions, Doreen – mind if I call you Doreen?'

'Of course not.'

'Did you ever hear the two Jessups talking about the *Kookaburra*?'

'No, never.'

'Did Paul ever explain anything more about the accusations of theft?'

'No.'

'Did you or Denise ask him about this?'

'I didn't, and I don't think Denise did – she didn't ever say so, anyhow.' Doreen was quite composed when talking about her sister.

'Are you sure no one ever told you anything about Paul Jessup – something which might explain his insistence in questioning you?'

After a pause, as if she was trying to understand the full implications of the question, Doreen said:

'No one ever said anything – except about the thefts on board the ship.'

'Did Paul ever say where he got his money from?' asked Roger.

'No.'

'Although you were living in a very ordinary house in a poor quarter of London, did you believe he had plenty of money.'

'Yes. I saw his wallet, crammed full, more than once.'

'Did he bring anyone else to see you?'

'No.'

'Did you ever go out to meet any of his friends?'

'No.'

'Didn't you think this strange?'

Doreen hesitated, but Roger did not prompt her.

'It didn't seem strange at first,' she said. 'I went out to work during the day, and in the evenings met Den and rushed off to see London We couldn't see enough of it – we loved every bit, We went to places like Windsor and Hampton Court at week-ends – Den loved the green of the grass – she —'

The girl's eyes flooded with tears, but she fought them back, and went on:

'Some evenings we went out to a movie, or dozed, or watched television. It wasn't until Denise went away that it really seemed strange. Then I was too frightened to think about it. It was like a nightmare – waiting, waiting.'

Now the tears spilled over.

When she had recovered, Roger asked quietly:

'Did the Jessups ever talk about Ben Limm?'

Immediately Doreen was on her guard.

'No, they didn't.'

'Did Ben ever talk about them?'

'No!'

'Never?' asked Roger, still gently.

'He said he didn't trust them. He had lunch with us the day we got to London, and we told him what the Jessups were going to do. He tried to stop us. He said they couldn't be trusted out of sight. He seemed to hate them!'

'Did he say why?'

'It was because of the trouble on the ship. It must have been.' For the first time since Roger had arrived hostility and suspicion were back in her manner – and again emotion touched her elfin face with unexpected beauty. 'Why do you keep on about Ben?'

Roger answered almost before the question was out.

'Because all the other passengers on the *Kookaburra* who

stayed in London have been attacked – except Benjamin Limm. Doesn't that strike you as odd?'

For a moment, Doreen looked shocked. Then anger flared in her eyes, and she jumped up and raised a clenched fist.

## 12

## Flying Orders

ROGER DID NOT move or flinch. The girl's cheeks were fiery red and her blue eyes sparked with her anger. For a moment it looked as if she would strike him, but she stopped herself, lowered her arm, and swung away.

'No, I don't think it's odd. You've got it in for Ben for some crazy reason.'

'Doreen —' began Roger.

'Don't call me Doreen!'

'Miss Morrison, whether you want to acknowledge it or not, it is most noteworthy that no one has shown any enmity towards Mr Limm. If you blind yourself to that you will be very silly. You might endanger your life again.'

She flared up again. 'Why do you keep accusing Ben?'

'I'm trying to make you understand that you don't know him well enough to trust him implicitly,' Roger answered. 'You only met him on the ship.'

'Anyone would think you knew he was a criminal!'

'I simply don't know enough about him yet,' Roger said. 'He may be, he probably is, everything he says he is. I hope that's how it turns out But don't take him or anyone for granted until the whole truth is known.'

Doreen was standing facing him, her lips quivering.

'If you hadn't let Marcus Jessup get away you wouldn't have to try to find a scapegoat.'

'No, I wouldn't, would I?' Roger said. 'I can tell you one thing for certain.'

'What's that?'

'Marcus Jessup – whose real name is Barring' – Roger paused long enough to judge whether that revelation meant anything to her, but she showed no sign – 'has left London. We think he is on his way to Australia. You might be safer in this country until he's caught.'

Doreen drew a deep, shuddering breath.

'I hate this country! I want to get out, out, out! Don't you understand? I want to go *home*. The police there won't let such dreadful things happen I want to go home!'

Roger picked up the statement from the bed, and handed it to her, together with a pen.

'Sign this,' he said. 'Then you will be free to go.'

She put the paper on a small table; it rustled a little under her unsteady fingers but her signature was swift and firm. She handed it to him with an air of defiance which showed no sign of waning.

'If I were you I'd stay here for the night,' Roger advised. 'But please yourself. Mr Limm will be here at about half past seven.' He nodded, without smiling, and turned away. He half expected Doreen to call him back, but she did not.

Next morning he had a report that Limm visited the nursing home on time, had a meal there with Doreen, and left at about ten o'clock. There was a later report: that Limm had booked two economy class seats on a BOAC flight from London Airport to Sydney. The plane was due to leave at 1015 on Monday in five days' time, and was due in Sydney on the Wednesday afternoon.

During the next two days there were no new developments of any significance. No news had come in about Sam Hackett, who was in fact having an incredibly wonderful time with his new light o' love in a small town in the Loire district. Sam appeared to be so enamoured that he might at any time propose marriage. He was seventy-seven, but nothing in his appearance or in his behaviour suggested he was a day over sixty.

The Parrishes, Jack and Jill, were enjoying the voyage back to Australia quite as much as they had enjoyed the one to England. Life was still a honeymoon, a long, golden honeymoon. They

had not even heard of what had happened to their fellow passengers in London. Even had they known that Marcus Jessup, alias Barring, was in Sydney waiting for the return of the ship, it would not have worried them; they were too happy, and completely unaware of danger. Jack Parrish was a tall, rangy Queenslander, lean faced, full of vigour and vitality Jill was nearly as tall, a handsome girl with a fine full figure who always ate a little too much. She was invariably cheerful. She worshipped her husband for his kindness, his humour, his devotion, and the grey flecks in his hair.

They were then twelve days out of Sydney.

On that particular day, the Friday before Doreen and Limm were to fly from London, it was very hot in Sydney, but dry and free from humidity. After a sticky late April, Sydneyites revelled in the day and began to hope that the weather would hold for the week-end. About five o'clock in the afternoon (seven o'clock in the morning in London, where Roger West was just getting up) Superintendent Luke Shaw of the Sydney CIB sat signing the day's letters He was a big, broad-faced man, who in repose could look almost dull, but in action had the speed and sharpness of a ferret.

There was a tap at his door, and it opened. He glanced up to see a young CIB officer, in plain-clothes. It would have surprised Roger West to see such a caller, unheralded, in an office the equivalent to Hardy's. Shaw wasn't surprised; he kept an ever-ready ear open to all the staff.

'Come in, Dyson. What's on your mind?' The subject could be anything from troubles at home to troubles in the office, an unofficial report or a complaint about a senior officer.

'I've got a suggestion to make, sir, about the filing system in the Handwriting Section when we move to the new premises.'

'Told Jack Clark about it?'

'He said to see you.'

'What is it?' asked Shaw.

'Instead of filing with the new cases at the front and the old ones at the back, why not vice versa?' suggested Dyson. 'Most references are to older cases – it would save time.'

'I'll have a word with Jack, but don't run away with the idea

that any department's going to have all the room they want when we move. They're converting an old factory, not putting up a new police palace like they do in the country towns such as Coffs Harbour.' Shaw was half serious. 'If it saves time it's all right with me, but I don't want any changes for the sake of change.'

'I won't suggest any of that kind,' Dyson assured him.

The telephone bell rang. Shaw picked it up as he waved Dyson away. Anyone who asked for him was put straight through; in Luke Shaw's book, formality was another word for loss of time.

'Shaw.'

'*Luke Shaw*?' a man asked.

'Yes, this is Luke Shaw.'

'*Superintendent* Luke Shaw?' the caller insisted.

Shaw frowned, the instinct for suspicion alert in him now. He shifted his position, pressed a bell for someone from outside to come in, and answered without any show of suspicion; there was a faint note of asperity in his voice, that was all.

'Yes, Superintendent Shaw speaking. Who is that?'

'You bloody coppers,' the caller said. 'You or the bloody pommies. You're going to get some shocks before this is over. Barring's back – Marcus Barring. You couldn't keep him out of the country, could you? The pommies couldn't keep him in theirs and you couldn't keep him out of ours. I'm telling you – he's spoiling for a fight.'

The line went dead as a sergeant came in from next door. The sergeant stood very still, watching Shaw's face, understanding his senior officer so well that he did not need telling that this was no time to talk.

At last, Shaw spoke.

'Marcus Barring's in town. Put out an all-state alert.' He banged the platform of the telephone up and down, and when the operator answered, he said sharply: 'Get me Superintendent West of Scotland Yard . . . Yes, London Eh?' He scowled. 'He'll be in his office around nine o'clock, I should say. I'll stay here until the call comes through.' He put the receiver down and pressed a bell. A moment later an older, white-haired man came in – Shaw's deputy. 'Mac, Marcus Barring's in town.'

'You sure?' Mac asked, reflectively.

'We had a tip-off,' Shaw replied, 'and the squeaker knew what he was talking about. I want you to drop everything, and concentrate on this. Handsome West should be on the line in a couple of hours, be ready to listen in on an extension.'

Mac said: 'My word I will.' He smoothed down silky, snow-white hair, which with his pale, blemishless skin gave him something of the look of an albino. 'I'd like one more thing, Luke.'

'What's that?'

'Confirmation that Barring's here.'

'Not satisfied?'

'Nor would you be if anyone else said so on the strength of one phone call. I'm prepared to bet you're right, but we still need proof.'

'That's what we'll get if enough of our chaps keep their eyes open,' Shaw retorted. He looked up at a tap at the door. 'Come in.' It was a youngish man, red-haired, bright-eyed. 'What is it, Red? I'm busy right now.'

'You're not too busy for this,' the younger man said. 'Here's a cable from West of the Yard.' He came up to the desk and planted a handwritten note in front of Shaw. 'Doreen Morrison and the man Limm are flying here early next week. West also says Marcus Barring has been traced as far as Bombay. They lost trace then. He could be in New South Wales by now.'

Shaw nodded.

'I'll be talking to West in a couple of hours,' he said. 'If anything else comes in from the Yard, or there's any word about Barring, let me know. You right?'

'I'm right,' Red said, and hurried out.

On that Friday morning Roger West arrived at the office just after eight o'clock. It was empty. He realized how accustomed he had become to seeing Kebble there. His desk was clear except for a couple of messages, put there recently. The morning's mail wasn't in yet, and his own desk was exactly as he had left it the previous night. As he sat down, loosening his collar, a telephone bell rang. He answered at once.

'West.'

'I heard you were in,' the operator said. 'There's a call coming through from Sydney, New South Wales, sir. What time can you take it?'

'Any time,' Roger said eagerly.

'It will be in about half an hour then. Will you stay in your office?'

'If I have to leave it I'll let you know where to find me.'

'If you would, sir.'

Roger put down the telephone, trying to discourage his rising excitement and an almost choky feeling of suffocation, an unreasoned presentiment which had been like a shadow over him from the beginning of this case. Again his mind flashed to the possibility of flying to Australia, but he set the thought firmly aside. He sat for a few seconds, then put in a call to Information.

'Who was watching Limm last night?'

'Detective Sergeant Scott, sir.'

'Has he reported?'

'All was well at eight o'clock, when he was relieved by Detective Officer Warrender.'

'And Miss Morrison?'

'The same, sir.'

'Thanks,' Roger said.

He went across to the window and looked out upon the Embankment. It was a grey, cheerless morning, with a spittle of rain in the air. The Thames was absolutely flat, rippling only when a string of barges or a motor-boat passed. He wondered what kind of sea the *Kookaburra* was sailing through It could be rough down there among the islands. He moved across to the bookcase by the side of his desk, took down a thick atlas, and turned to the Far East. The ship should be somewhere near the Philippines in the seas of countless islands, tropical heat, cyclones which could swallow up great ships.

It *should* be near there, but – was it?

If there was any trouble at all with the *Kookaburra*, word would come through in a few hours. In these days of swift communication ships didn't simply vanish without a trace.

A thought came to him, swift and binding. He stood very still,

poring over the page in the atlas. He turned abruptly, sat down and took up the file on the *Kookaburra* case, opened it, and thumbed it through. Kebble had prepared the file with his usual thoroughness. Roger came upon a smooth, shiny brochure with a white slip on it. *The Blue Flag Line Sailing Lists.* On the first page was a list of the ships of the line, and at the top the note:

> The Blue Flag Line is today a fleet of 27 modern cargo vessels, each of which carries passengers. Each ship sails from Australian ports carrying Australian goods to all parts of the world. From the *Kangaroo,* the commodore ship of the line, twenty-two thousand tons gross with first-class accommodation for over 200 passengers to the *Kookaburra,* of seven thousand tons gross weight carrying 12 first-class passengers, the 27 ships have the best possible facilities for both passengers and cargo.

There followed a list of the ships. *Kangaroo, Blue Gem, Merino, Alice, Barbarossa* . . . each one had some kind of Australian association although he was not aware of the full significance of it.

Somewhere on the Seven Seas ships of the Blue Flag Line were carrying precious cargoes. . . .

If this was a campaign of hate against the Blue Flag Line, why stop at the *Kookaburra*? Why stop at any one vessel? There were twenty-seven ships of the line.

His telephone bell rang. It seemed to rasp at him from some other world, jarring through the quiet of the office and the shocked stillness of his own mind. It rang again and again. When he lifted it there was asperity in the operator's voice.

'Oh, you *are* there. Your call from Australia.'

'I'll take it.'

'It's Superintendent Shaw.'

'Thanks.'

'Handsome,' Shaw said. This time he seemed rather farther away, but his voice and his words were clear enough. 'I've some news for you. Marcus Barring is here in New South Wales. It's positive now – he's been seen by two uniformed men, but they

weren't able to pick him up. It looks as if he'll be waiting here – for the Parrishes and for the Morrison girl and Limm.'

'Could be,' Roger said. 'Watch them closely, Luke.'

'It's a hell of a problem,' Shaw said 'We can't be sure there's any danger to anyone on the *Kookaburra*, and we can't be sure the *Kookaburra*'s in danger.'

'We can't be sure which ship in the Blue Flag Line is in danger, can we?' asked Roger. 'We've got to get Barring, we've got to get his missing brother Solomon. Luke, how about a man six feet tall, thirty-five or so, between-colours, grey eyes, slightly curly hair, full of vitality, very direct way of talking. Could that be Solomon Barring?'

'It could,' answered Shaw, shortly. 'Yes, it could.'

'Check on Benjamin Limm, of Cowra —' began Roger.

'I'm checking,' said Shaw. 'It's just conceivable —' He broke off. 'One thing's certain.'

'What's that?'

'The centre of the case has moved into this hemisphere.'

'Don't I know it.'

'Coming on the same plane as Limm and the girl?' inquired Shaw.

'I'll let you know,' said Roger. 'I very much doubt it.'

Hardy was in early that Friday. It was one of his good mornings – Roger sometimes wondered whether his moods were due to pressures at home.

'It's taken you a long time to get round to it,' he said. 'Yes – the same plane as Limm is a good idea. Can Kebble keep your office ticking over?'

In a curious mood between excitement and apprehension, Roger said:

'He's certainly worth a trial Then I'll go?'

'Don't ask me to square it with your wife,' Hardy said drily.

# 13

# Flight

JANET WAS AT London Airport to see Roger off. Both boys had staked a claim to accompany her, but they were at their jobs, and Janet, trying not to show how much she wished she was going, was allowed into the roped-off section where the passengers waited. This was almost the identical spot where Percy Sheldon had died. Over by that same buffet, open to passengers and visitors and doing a brisk trade, Paul Barring alias Jessup had jabbed home the deadly needle.

Limm was standing there with Doreen.

In another corner Cyril Gee and his Sal were present under restrained protest, to tell the police if they saw anyone who had been here on the afternoon of Sheldon's death. So far they had shown no sign. It was just on ten o'clock, and the call for the passengers to board the aircraft would soon be made. Janet was almost too bright-eyed; Australia was a long way off, and Roger's trips abroad too few for her to be used to saying goodbye for any long period.

'. . . and if it's too hot in Sydney, you must buy a lightweight suit,' she was saying.

That was when young Cyril Gee seemed to come alive. He had seen someone he recognized. Roger moved his head to look about. Janet went on talking. Gee was looking towards a noisy group near the news-stand. Two policemen, including Sandys of the airport police, were watching him. The members of the party moved, hilariously, and beyond them Roger could now see Lancelot Smith, the Blue Flag Line's London manager.

Gee caught Roger's eye.

'You haven't heard a word I've said,' Janet said, more forlorn than angry. 'Roger, *please*. It's a different climate, and it's bound to take you a day or two to get used to it. You must be careful.'

A clear voice sounded above hers, above all the sounds of the airport building.

*'Will all passengers for Flight 34 for Zurich, Rome, Beirut, Bahrain, Delhi, Bangkok, Hong Kong, and Sydney please take their seats.'*

There was a surge forward by thirty or forty passengers, those eager to move off. The crowd was suddenly much thinner. Lancelot Smith, his simian face strangely incongruous against his immaculate clothes, drew nearer the cordon. He was looking about him as if in desperation – as if he must see someone he knew to be here but was afraid he was too late.

He saw Roger, and changed direction. So did Sandys, and a Yard man, but they were farther away. Roger felt a moment of absolute panic It was as if Smith was coming at him, with murder in his eyes. He carried an umbrella and raised it. Janet said in sudden alarm:

'Roger! What is it?'

Roger stepped swiftly in front of her, as if that umbrella was lethal.

'Mr West!' called Smith. 'Mr West.' He was waving his umbrella.

'This is ridiculous,' Roger thought. 'He can't mean any harm, I'm making a fool of myself.'

'*Roger!*' breathed Janet.

'*Mr West!* Superintendent —'

Sandys and the big Yard man ranged themselves on either side of Smith; even if he intended harm he could do none now Roger raised one hand to acknowledge him, and touched Janet's shoulder.

'Just stay here. I won't be a minute' He went forward. Neither of the other detectives touched Smith but they were within hands' reach. He did not seem to notice them. His upper lip was beaded with big blobs of perspiration His thick, ponderous lower lip was quivering His eyes seemed buried behind the high cheekbones.

'Mr West, there is something I must tell you.'

Janet was whispering in Roger's ear.

'Jan, quiet, *please*. Yes, Mr Smith?' His voice changed from imploring to curt and hostile. Smith was only a foot or two

away from him. He was breathing heavily; stertorously. His words came out with great difficulty.

'I want to warn – to warn – you. It could happen to – to any ship of ours. Any ship. Believe me. None is safe' Sweat in great blobs was on his forehead. 'I should have told you before. I was too – too frightened.'

Janet was whispering.

'For God's sake keep quiet!' Roger half turned as he spoke to her, and saw how shocked she was. The Yard man by Smith had his notebook out. 'Who is doing this?' Roger demanded roughly. 'Where is —'

Smith staggered. Sandys grabbed him, as if afraid he would fall.

*'He's terribly ill!'* Janet cried.

That was what she had been trying to say.

'Find the – the Barring family. They – they hate —' Smith choked on the word, then sucked in a rasping breath.

'Where is Solomon Barring?' Roger asked, now almost savagely. 'Is there anyone else? Tell me!'

'Marcus – Marcus is back in Australia. I don't – don't know where Solomon is. I don't —'

Smith almost fell, his knees buckling, out of control.

*'He's dying,'* Janet cried 'Get a doctor! Roger, get a doctor.'

Smith looked like a great ape as he clutched Sandys' arm.

'I took – I took strychnine,' he gasped. 'I couldn't face – face my responsibility. I should have told —'

A man pushed his way through the crowd as Smith broke into a piercing scream of agony. He fell out of Sandys' grasp, his body seemed to writhe, then straightened out as if he were on a rack; then arched. The thrusting man bent over him as he screamed again but it was only a rasping echo of the earlier sound.

Roger stood staring, Janet beside him, shocked.

*'Will all passengers for Flight 34 for Zurich, Rome, Beirut, Bahrain, Delhi, Bangkok, Hong Kong, and Sydney please take their seats.'*

Sandys said gruffly: 'I'll get that flight postponed for half an hour.' He moved off as other policemen came up.

Nearby the Gees stood, stunned as was everyone who had seen or heard, staring at the stricken man Roger was acutely conscious of the way he had shouted at Janet, yet was trying to assimilate all that Smith had told him Now he knew more of the truth and the full horror of what could happen, it tore at his mind.

Janet stood in front of him.

'It's all right, darling,' she said. 'Don't worry about me, please don't worry.' She was pleading. 'It was my fault.'

'*Your —*'

'I'm going to leave, you must look after this,' Janet said. Her eyes were glistening with tears, her hand was tight on his. 'Take care of yourself.' She put her face up.

He bent down, slowly Suddenly, he swept her into his arms, and held her close with a fierce hug. He could feel her heart thumping, thumping He could feel his heart, racing, racing. How much she meant to him; how much they meant to each other.

He let her go. He had a glimpse of her face for a moment; it was radiant. Then she turned and pushed her way through the crowd. The cordon was gone, so many police and officials were about. Smith had come out of the first spasm, and his body was relaxed, but the next would come soon, bringing its agony; and the next and next, until he died.

Could the doctor help him?

He was trying to say something as he lay there, looking at Roger Roger moved forward, and went down on one knee. Smith was whispering:

'*Did this – myself. Awful – awful – quite awful. Save – save them. Please —*'

Then his body was caught in the awful second spasm, the breath was forced out of his mouth in a hideous screech, his body arched The doctor said to Roger:

'We'll have him away in a few seconds. I doubt if he'll talk again.'

'Can you help him?'

'With the pain, yes. He's gone too far for anything else.'

'*Will passengers for Flight 34 to Zürich, Rome, and places East please take their seats.*'

Two men appeared with a stretcher, and Sandys arrived just as they were lifting Smith on to it.

'Take your time, Handsome – you can have twenty minutes. If you decide to catch a later plane —'

Doreen Morrison and Ben Limm were on this one

'I'll catch 34,' Roger said. 'I'll just have a word with my chaps.' He moved, and saw Kebble, hurrying The incredible thing about the young sergeant was that whenever he was wanted he was at hand. 'What's brought you?' Roger demanded.

'Smith rang up and said he had to talk to you,' Kebble answered. 'He sounded desperate, so I thought I ought to be here if he missed you.' Kebble looked at the stretcher and the now relaxed figure covered with a blanket. 'Did he say anything?'

Roger told him.

'My God!' Kebble muttered. 'And there are twenty-seven ships in that line.'

'Telephone Sydney, talk to Shaw, tell him exactly what Smith said,' ordered Roger 'Don't make any suggestion about what to do – leave it entirely to him. The sergeant here made a lot of notes – give Shaw the lot, won't you?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Keep my wife posted,' Roger said 'She saw the collapse, but she may not believe Smith committed suicide. Check, make sure – I don't think there's any doubt, but make sure – then call on my wife and tell her. Otherwise she'll run around with the idea that it will be my turn next.'

'I'll tell her,' Kebble promised.

Roger shook hands.

'Take a night off now and again, for Kitty's sake,' he said. 'Never lose a chance of time off, Keb – there'll be a hell of a lot of nights when you'll have to stand her up.'

Kebble looked astounded. 'You know about *Kit*?'

Roger grinned.

'The Yard's just a big village,' he said. 'You'll find out.'

He turned and made his way to the entrance gate, stepped through to the vast expanse of the airfield. He was almost deafened by the roar of a great plane, some distance off. He had expected to see a Comet; instead a Boeing 707 was waiting.

Officials hurried with him through the drizzle sweeping miserably across the airfield, even the waiting fire trucks and petrol-tenders looked forlorn, and a few mechanics were huddled up in macintoshes against the rain

'The first-class door is shut, sir, you won't mind walking through the economy class, will you?'

'I thought that's where I was booked'

'We like to look after our top Yard man, sir!'

Roger smiled. 'Nice of you' But he wouldn't be so close to Limm. He climbed up into the aircraft, where two stewards and a stewardess were waiting for him. The stewardess led the way towards the front.

'Just follow me, sir.'

He knew that the passengers were staring at him A man said in an audible whisper: 'Some people never learn to be on time.' Limm, on the outside seat next to Doreen, seemed about to speak, but did not. Doreen's knees were pressed close together; for some odd reason Roger remembered her rather big calves. The stewardess led the way through an open door, into a cabin which was much more spacious, and with larger seats, two on each side of the gangway.

There were two empty seats on the right.

'Here you are, Mr West Seat 7.' The girl smiled. She was not particularly pretty, but had a nice smile and was beautifully made up 'Fasten your seat belt right away, please.'

'About time, too,' a woman remarked sourly

She didn't matter. Nothing mattered but the fate of hundreds, thousands of people, sailing the seven seas in Blue Flag Line ships. A picture of Smith's ugly, almost animal-like face hovered in front of Roger's mind. Not daring to face up to the responsibility, the manager had preferred to kill himself. How much more could he have told? Conceivably enough to make a quick end to this case.

Why hadn't he wanted to stay alive?

The aircraft was taxi-ing. Behind Roger, a woman said: 'This is always the moment I hate most.' There was a fierce roar and rush of noise, a sense of surging motion. Aircraft, buildings, green fields, and motor-cars seemed to rush by. There was

a curious kind of silent commotion, a feeling of tension and at the same time of relaxation The smiling stewardess stood by the lounge door, and a steward talked in a cheerful faintly Cockney voice farther along. The clouds were thick grey-white mist groping at the windows.

Suddenly, there was bright, almost blinding light; the sun, shining on top of clouds which lost their greyness and were soft and billowing white. Above, the sky was unbelievably blue.

Roger settled back in his seat.

Smith's face faded from his mind's eye; Janet's, touched with that radiance, replaced it. Why the devil had he let fly at her like that? He knew the answer, even though it failed to satisfy him. He was far too tense and worked up about this case, with a sense of deep personal involvement It was no use arguing that the case warranted such tension, anyhow A policeman must be objective, free from emotional reactions, one could not see the whole of the problem until he did. In a way the flight should help him. He could relax for forty-eight hours, doze, sleep, eat, drink, let the facts drift through his mind. If he needed to send messages, he could do so over the radio; if any news came for him he would have it almost as quickly as he would on the telephone in his office.

The Channel was hidden by thick cloud. There being nothing to see, Roger closed his eyes. He seemed to have been sitting there for ten minutes when the stewardess touched his shoulder.

'Fasten your seat belt, please.'

'Already? Why?' Roger struggled up.

'We're approaching Zurich, Mr West '

'That's the quickest hour I've ever passed,' Roger said ruefully.

'We made up some time, the wind was behind us,' the stewardess told him. 'We have three-quarters of an hour here, sir. Will you leave the plane?'

'I think so,' Roger said.

As they lost height he got a confused impression of a big city and a big expanse of blue water, all beautiful in the sunlight;

London's drizzle seemed a thousand miles away. Of course, it almost was! He saw one group of people streaming towards customs, and others waiting about. He left his coat inside the cabin and stepped into summer warmth. A car drew up alongside him and a good-looking, middle-aged man got out.

'I believe you are Superintendent West.'

'That's right,' Roger sounded as surprised as he felt.

'I am Inspector Müller,' the other said, and shook hands. 'I am sorry your visit to Zürich is so brief, but from Kloten here we have a half-hour's drive to the city, so it is too far. You will have a drink, though, I hope.'

'I'd be happy to,' Roger said appreciatively.

'Please get in.' Müller was as immaculate as Smith had been. He closed the door, settled down, and said in a different tone: 'I have a message for you, Superintendent. The man Lancelot Smith is dead. That is bad news, I fear.'

Depression swept Roger's good spirits away.

I wonder if we'll ever know how bad, he thought.

Brooding over the case could not stop Roger from being transfixed by the beauty and the grandeur of the Alps. He sensed how all the passengers were enthralled as they glided over the thrusting, glistening peaks, the almost audible sigh of regret when they passed over the foothills and flew over the plains. The Mediterranean appeared, so rich a blue that it looked unreal. The ships on it were like white toys. Roger approached Rome, half apprehensive in case there should be another message. There was none, but two handsome Roman police officials were there to greet him with the news that the Donellis appeared to be happy and in no danger at Naples.

'We shall look after them, there is nothing to worry about,' one man said confidently.

Limm and Doreen also stretched their legs They kept close together, as young lovers might.

No one met him at Beirut.

Immediately after dinner they flew into a moonless sky in which the stars seemed to scatter themselves about the aircraft. Roger slept, dreamlessly. He stayed in his seat at Bahrain and

slept again to Delhi. As he stepped out of the aircraft there into a cool early morning with the dawn glowing faintly beyond the horizon, a Sikh in western clothes but wearing a huge turban, came forward, teeth dazzling white against his great black beard.

'Roger, my good friend!'

'Ram Singh!' Roger's heart leapt. Only six months ago this Indian detective had stayed for a month in London, spending much time with Roger both at the Yard and at home.

'It is wicked for you to have so little time, I cannot even arrange a rope-trick for you! I have a message, though, from your office.'

Roger's heart lurched.

'Is it good news or bad?'

'It is to tell you that a Mr Samuel Hackett – *Hackett* is right, yes? – has been located in France. He appears to be in excellent health. Also,' went on Ram Singh, 'a message from Sydney, Australia, comes from Superintendent Shaw. I met him when he flew through Delhi three years ago. He says you cannot arrive at Sydney soon enough for him. He has been informed about the warning from a man named Smith. He says also that he takes the case very seriously indeed.'

The big Sikh was no longer smiling; it was as if he were touched by anxiety just as much as Roger. As they stood there, Ben Limm and Doreen came out of the other exit of the aircraft. The girl looked very tired, and even Limm's vitality seemed to have wilted Roger waved, the others waved back, the Sikh said:

'Obviously you take it very seriously, too.'

# 14

# Hong Kong Welcome

'THE CAPTAIN'S COMPLIMENTS, Mr West, and would you like to go up front with him as we approach Hong Kong?' The second officer, a tall, amiable-looking young man with a broken nose, bent over Roger. 'We'll be there in twenty-five minutes.'

'I'd like to very much,' Roger said

Several of the passengers who had come all the way from London watched, but no longer with any sign of envy; everyone now knew who he was, and the familiar, often welcome but sometimes exasperating sense of awe of a senior policeman showed clearly. He went through the lounge, where three men and one middle-aged woman dressed like a teenager were drinking, then stepped on to the flight deck. There was more noise, some vibration, and an appearance of high organization and efficiency. Ahead was the instrument panel, so big and complicated that it seemed to need a man with a robot mind to understand it.

The second pilot's seat was empty. The captain turned, beckoned, leaned across, and shook hands as Roger settled into the seat.

'Sorry we haven't had a chance to meet before, Superintendent.'

'I'm glad of it now,' Roger said.

'Proud to have you with us.'

Roger murmured a disclaimer.

'I'm just a policeman.'

The captain smiled.

'I've heard you called other things.' He turned away. 'How about *that*, sir? Red China and Hong Kong, looking thick as thieves.'

Ahead was a mass of land beyond a sea which was as blue

as the Mediterranean. The great rocks of Hong Kong and the surrounding islands looked like huge diamonds as they glistened in the sun. The water was dotted with small craft and large; liners, cargo boats, sampans, countless junks with dark-brown sails. As they drew nearer, Roger could pick out spots he had often seen in pictures but never in real life.

'We fly low over Victoria, the city on Hong Kong Island,' the captain said. 'Famous for its shanty towns and the homes in the rocks, or William Holden and Suzie Wong, whichever you prefer Over there is Kowloon, you see where the long isthmus strikes out – there's a plane taking off.'

Roger said: 'I see it. It's surpassed all my expectations already.'

'First time?'

'Yes.'

'Just sit back and take it in,' said the captain. 'I won't spoil it with chatter. If you want to know anything —'

'Those white boats – I can see four or five of them,' Roger said.

'Ferries from Hong Kong to Kowloon.'

'Oh.'

'Wonderful organization, and always has been.' After a few moments' silence while Roger marvelled, the captain asked: 'Spending any time here?'

'Just a few hours. Do you fly the plane on to Darwin and Sydney?'

'Not this one. I may do tomorrow's flight, I don't know who it will be today, I'm afraid. If you can spare any of your couple of hours to look around the place, jump at the chance. I go round every month or so and still don't believe it. See you before I go off, sir.'

'Good,' Roger said. 'Thanks.'

He was about to get up, and the island seemed very close, crowded with houses and people, when he saw a ship with a white funnel and a blue flag on it. The sight of it was like a physical blow. Both captain and second pilot looked at him curiously. As he went back to his seat, he no longer saw the islands and the water as places of grandeur, but as the place

where the *Kookaburra* had called only a week or ten days earlier, where nearly all the Blue Flag Line ships called. At his window he looked out, trying to spot the ship again.

There it was, by itself at a quay which jutted out from the mainland. Near it was a railway.

'Fasten your belts, please,' came over the loudspeaker.

The water seemed to be coming up to engulf them until suddenly they bumped, bounced, then ran along the tarmac with the blue waters stretching out on either side. The stewardess came up to Roger.

'There's a messenger waiting for you, Mr West. Hope you enjoy the rest of the trip.'

'I will if it's like this one ' Roger shook hands.

He was the first out into the gilded sunlight of the late afternoon. At the foot of the steps, even before they were pushed properly into position, was a tall, smiling man – Luke Shaw of the Sydney CIB with another tall, leaner man – Fred Hodges of the Hong Kong police.

They gripped hands, equally pleased to see one another, and moved off together towards a police car, until Roger said suddenly:

'You two will have my stripes. Limm and Doreen Morrison are on board, I don't want them to wander off on their own.'

'I've three men here who've studied their photographs,' Hodges said comfortingly. 'Can't you slacken off even for an hour?'

'If I get the chance.'

'I've told Luke that you can forget the *Kookaburra* while you're here,' said Hodges. 'He can brief you on the way to Sydney – he's learned all there is to see here.'

'Don't tell Handsome West that,' protested Shaw. 'He'll want to check for himself.' They were getting into the car. 'I arrived yesterday, Handsome, to check all I could with the agents of the Blue Flag Line here. It's the second most important office. The head office is in Sydney, but you knew that.'

'Didn't stop him from doing the Hong Kong Island trip –

*and* the night clubs. What an appetite for legs these Aussies have.' Hodges laughed heartily. 'We can fit in —'

He stopped abruptly, looking across the airfield, snapped: 'Swing round, Ling,' to the Chinese chauffeur, and added almost in the same breath: 'I've just seen the nastiest piece of work in Kowloon, proper artist with a knife.' To the chauffeur he barked: 'That cyclist – catch him.'

The cyclist was a hundred yards away, near the airport buildings. Two cars and a fire-truck were in the way of the police car. Roger felt a desperate desire to get out and run towards the passengers now moving from the airport building towards coaches marked: 'Special Tours'. The cyclist was nearer those than the police car when Ben Limm and Doreen appeared.

'Honk your horn!' roared Hodges.

The driver swung round the last car, hand on horn, blaring. All the passengers and officials started, looked round and stared. The cyclist was heading straight for Limm and Doreen. Roger felt a thousand miles away, and utterly helpless.

Limm sprang in front of the girl as the cyclist drew up. Even from this distance, Roger saw a flash, as of steel. Then two men near Limm and the girl flung themselves at the cyclist. There was a fierce, vicious struggle, a human dog-fight. One man backed away, blood streaming from a nasty cut in his left hand. As the car pulled up, the cyclist went down with a thud, his head banged on the hard ground, and the knife clattered from his hand.

Hodges was breathing hard.

'I told you we'd look after her,' he said.

Doreen Morrison was huddled against Limm, her head on his chest. His long arms were about her, protectingly. He was staring down at the assailant and the bloodstained knife, horror reflected in his eyes.

Roger found himself speaking.

'Who did he come for, Limm? You or Doreen?'

Limm didn't speak.

'He went for the girl, no doubt about that,' said the policeman. 'If he'd wanted the man he could have got him with a single throw.'

'The man saved her,' another policeman chimed in.

'That made him pretty quick,' Hodges remarked.

'Almost as if he knew what was coming.' Luke Shaw was looking so intently at Limm that Limm turned his head and stared at him, without moving his arms from the girl. 'That's Benjamin Limm, isn't it?'

'Yes,' answered Roger.

'If he knew what was going to happen, why should he save her life?' asked Hodges.

'We need to know a lot more about Ben Limm,' said Shaw heavily. 'You weren't slow on the up-take, Fred. Say you know the Chinaman?'

'Yes, I know Wu Hong,' Hodges said. He watched as the assailant was pulled to his feet and handcuffed. He raised his voice: 'Take him to my office, I'll be along.' To Roger and Shaw he continued: 'He's Wu Hong, once one of the trouble-shooters for a big tong, until it went respectable. He's what they call an artist with a knife – he can hit a moving target at thirty yards and a motionless one at fifty. He had to come close to avoid the people round her. Otherwise she'd be dead. Let's get going.'

'I'll have a word with Ben Limm, and make sure the girl's guarded, Fred,' Roger said to Hodges. He moved across as the girl eased herself from the big Australian Her eyes looked huge and her face so white she looked as if she would faint. 'Is she all right?'

'Just about,' Limm grunted.

'Thanks to you,' Roger said.

'I did the only thing.'

'How well do you know Wu Hong?'

Limm's eyes narrowed as if in surprise.

'Who?'

'The attacker.'

'What the hell are you trying to say?' Limm demanded angrily. 'I saw him take his knife out – I'd been watching for anything suspicious. You told me she would be in danger, didn't you?'

'I warned you,' Roger said. 'From now on she will be under

close police protection – while here in Hong Kong, on the aircraft, and in Sydney.'

'Who's objecting?' Limm was more his truculent than his angry self now.

Doreen must have understood every word, but she showed no sign. She reminded Roger vividly of the way she had looked in the room at Notting Hill, when she had been so near death. Looking at her he felt he could almost feel something of her anguish. Soon, questions so obvious that they were easy to overlook, came to his mind.

Why should anyone be so determined to kill her? Surely she *must* know the answer to that at least.

And why was Limm never attacked?

Roger went back to the car and got in. The chauffeur closed the door on him and hurried to the wheel. Hodges, in front, was turning round and talking to Shaw. As the car moved off, Hodges said:

'We can take care of this, Handsome. No need for you to miss your sightseeing.'

'The only sight I want to see is Fred's office, and Wu Hong's face when he starts talking,' Roger said.

## 15

## Wu Hong

IT WAS EASY to have preconceived notions about people, dangerously easy to generalize. The Chinese were said so often to be inscrutable. Wu Hong was a little, wizened man with skin like old parchment, eyes bloodshot, hands full of dark-blue veins. He wore a faded blue denim shirt and khaki trousers so often washed that they seemed no colour at all. In his nervousness he smiled widely at the policemen, showing gaps in his yellow teeth.

'He's full to the neck with opium,' Hodges said. 'Lives on the damned stuff.' He stood up from his big desk as Wu Hong

came slowly in. He didn't speak to the Chinaman for a long time, just stared at him. The smile became a grin, the eyes puckered, the almost colourless lips quivered

Hodges spoke suddenly, softly, in Chinese. His manner was almost friendly Wu Hong answered in a spate of words, clack, clack, clack, clack, clack. Hodges interrupted, there was a sharp exchange, and then the Chinaman averted his eyes.

Hodges said in English:

'Marcus Barring hired him for the job.'

'*Marcus Barring*,' ejaculated Shaw. 'Did he come through here?'

'Yes – so Wu Hong says. Five days ago.'

'But he couldn't have know then that Doreen Morrison was coming this way or on this plane,' objected Roger sharply.

'He said she would probably be coming through, and Wu Hong was to watch each aircraft for the girl. Barring showed him a photograph of her, so that he could recognize her.'

'But *this* plane,' Shaw said sceptically.

'Don't make a mystery of it,' Hodges protested 'Wu Hong knows a dozen people who work at the airport. There aren't so many aircraft flying in here, all he had to do was be nearby so that he could pick up a message from anyone on the airport staff who knew when the planes were due. Ten minutes' notice was all he needed, on his bike. We'll start inquiries to try to find out who tipped him off, but it won't be easy.'

'I'd like a go at him now,' Luke Shaw said firmly.

Hodges grinned.

'You'd be welcome – he'd have the time of his life lying to you in pidgin English.'

'Fred,' Roger said, 'how much did Barring pay him?'

'Two hundred Hong Kong dollars. Say twelve pounds ten.'

'*To kill*?'

'Life's cheap here,' Hodges said drily. 'Too cheap.'

'Has he worked for Barring before?'

'I'll try him with that one,' Hodges said.

'Try him by saying you know he killed Neil Sanderson, of the *Kookaburra*,' Roger suggested.

'Don't get me wrong, but it might take weeks to get a full

story out of this man,' Hodges said. 'We're damned lucky he named Marcus Barring so early. He probably knows Barring is on the run already. He can't deny the attack on the Morrison girl, but he can deny knowing anything about the murder of Sanderson. I might be able to break him down but I'd have to use all the tricks the Chinese know, and it can't be done in a hurry.'

When Hodges stopped, Roger said briefly: 'Sorry I spoke.'

'I mean it, Handsome. No offence intended.'

Roger grinned. 'Don't be an idiot, of course there wasn't.'

'Tell you what,' put in Luke Shaw, who never liked to keep silent for long, 'now you've got a start, Fred, keep at Wu Hong and his tong friends, and give the Blue Flag Line all you've got. We'll keep in touch by radio-telephone if needs be.'

'Fair enough,' agreed Hodges. He nodded to the men who were guarding the Chinaman. 'Take him away. Don't let him get near any stuff, he might crack sooner than we expect if he has to go without it.'

'Stuff?' echoed Shaw.

'Opium.'

'You talk as if it were as easy to get as aspirin.'

'That's how they can get the crude stuff out here,' Hodges said. 'We have all our work cut out to stop them refining it and exporting it to the USA. Next time you're this way remind us to tell you all about the opium business.' He grinned as he looked at his watch. 'We could delay that aircraft, Handsome.'

'Let's get off on time,' Roger urged. 'The quicker we're in Australia the better.'

'You're learning ' Shaw grinned.

'Come back with your wife another time, I'll lay everything on,' Hodges said earnestly. 'Damned sorry you couldn't look around this time. But you've one treat in store. Hong Kong by night from the air is fantastic.'

Roger leaned against his window and stared at the stars below him; or lights which looked like stars of a hundred different colours. Lights glimmered and shimmered from ships and ferries and reflected in the water. Lights blazed from the city of Kowloon. Lights of cars streaked about the mainland

and curved about the steep roads of the island like shooting stars seen in a mirror. For the first time since the attack on Doreen, Roger forgot the case.

For the first time since then, too, Doreen relaxed. She stared down at the fairyland, enthralled, and said in a low-pitched voice:

'Isn't it wonderful, Ben?'

'Wonderful,' Limm echoed huskily.

As they gained height, she leaned against him. His right arm slid round her waist, and was still. She looked up into his eyes, without speaking. He raised his hand, very slowly, to the gentle swell of her breast, and she smiled, and nestled closer.

Soon, she said: 'Ben, you'll always keep me safe, won't you?'

'I'll keep you safe,' he promised.

On the deck of the SS *Kookaburra*, now sailing past the southern tip of the Isle of Celebes towards the Timor Sea at a steady sixteen knots, Jack and Jill Parrish were standing at the rail. The night was starlit and calm, and very warm. Jill wore a thin cotton frock, a bra, and panties; all the night demanded. Jack Parrish, twelve years or so her senior, stood with his arms about her, caressingly. It was as if it was impossible for them to be alone together too often. Each was completely absorbed in the other.

Their cheeks touched.

'There's only one thing wrong,' Jill said softly.

'Nothing's wrong, my sweet.'

'We've six days left, that's all.'

'We've a lifetime left,' Jack Parrish said.

'It can't ever be *quite* the same.'

'You'd be surprised how romantic banana plantations can be,' Parrish said, and made her laugh. That was one of the wonderful things about him: he could always make her laugh, always make her relish every minute of living.

A passenger, a man, walked past them, cigarette glowing.

'Goodnight.'

They echoed: 'Goodnight.' Parish squeezed his wife's waist again, and said: 'We might as well go down.'

'Hm – hm.'

She stood and watched the dark bosom of the sea, until he led her slowly, gently, to their cabin.

Old Sam Hackett lay in bed.

He knew by now that he wasn't so young as he once had been, and he was tired – nearly exhausted. He was also very, very contented! It was a strange feeling for a man who had been so active most of his life, and never content when doing nothing.

He watched Thérèse.

She was thirty-five or six, he knew, and that was very young to him. He had admired her fine figure from the time they had first met, when he had been on a night-club tour of Paris and she had been a hostess. Now he could admire her body, so full, so firm. She was not shameless, but simply natural with him.

He could ask her to marry him.

He could not make up his mind whether to or not, for two reasons. She might refuse, and that would be a great blow to his pride, for he believed she loved him. It had been a strange belief at first, but now it was firm and deep, although he was afraid to put it to the test. The second reason was one he resented in a way, although he could blame only himself for it.

Did he really *want* to get married? A widower for over ten years, he had been used to doing exactly what he pleased and going wherever he wished. Just now, this Junoesque woman with her broken English and her matter-of-factness, infatuated him. He wanted nothing more than to be with her. She turned away from the table, where she had been making coffee with an electric percolator. She wore a short-length dressing-gown, open at the front, and it gaped farther as she carried two full cups nearly at arms' length. She sat down in a wicker chair filled with cushions, balancing the cups dexterously.

She handed him one.

'This is what you need, old one,' she said. Her eyes laughed at him 'This will make a man of you!'

He found himself laughing.

What *would* she say if he asked her to marry him? Would

she laugh at him, then? Did she know how rich he was? What would his friends say if he took a new wife back to Australia?

As the 707 flew towards Sydney the sky in the east was a glory in gold touched with red, rich as a deep rose lit by the bright morning sun. The light spread over the sleeping city, lighting up the windows of the tall, new skyscrapers, bathing the clear, calm water of the harbour with its warm beauty. The beaches, surf-rimmed as if with sugar icing, stretched in all directions The bridge was like an enormous toy, and already busy with traffic.

'Our new headquarters is over there,' Luke Shaw said, pointing. 'We haven't moved in yet. And even then we won't have everything in the same building. Funny thing, they'll spend millions on business houses and opera houses but when it comes to police headquarters we have to settle for an old factory. The tall, narrow building, the new one with the silvery look, that's Ocean House. The Blue Flag Line's offices are on the top two floors. The directors and their secretaries are on the top floor – fourteen. I told you that Raymond Flag is the chairman and I told you that his brother Gregory is the managing director, didn't I? They're both Australian born.'

'And Mortimer, the secretary, is an English cousin who's been here fifteen years,' Roger said. 'Yes, you told me.'

'Thought you might have forgotten,' Luke said slyly. Then more excitedly: 'Look down there! See, near the docks – follow the harbour along from the bridge, see that ship? Is she moving in or out?'

Roger craned his neck forward to see, and immediately saw the white funnel and the blue flag painted on it. Then it was lost to sight as the aircraft made a slow turn.

'There's our problem,' Shaw went on. 'Whether to warn all the masters of the ships or not I told you I think we should, and I've told the Commissioner, too. We're due for that conference this afternoon. We'll have the answer then.'

'What does the Commissioner think?' asked Roger.

'Don't know. He's a fly old customer, you can never be sure which way he'll jump – but he won't be difficult at the conference, if he decides against us he'll tell us ourselves.'

Roger, watching the green fields of the Kingsford Smith Airport, didn't speak.

'I'm taking it for granted you think everyone should be warned,' Shaw said. 'You haven't said so yet, Handsome.'

'Haven't sized it up in my mind,' Roger admitted. 'Let's see what turns up.' He saw the notice to fasten seat belts flash on and off; it was becoming almost second nature to do so now. A plumper, prettier stewardess went along to check the belts. The aircraft lost height. He wondered how Doreen Morrison was feeling, felt that sense of impending disaster as he had so often He was on his feet almost as soon as they had come to a standstill, and the first out of the cabin. The sun was blinding, almost white. He climbed down the steps with Shaw on his heels. A police car was waiting, and several plainclothes men were standing about.

'Three of my chaps are there to look after the girl and Limm,' said Shaw. 'You worry too much. Nothing will happen here.'

Roger didn't speak.

Soon, Limm and Doreen got down. The girl was nervous, glancing about her in all directions. If danger struck, she seemed to say, this was when it would strike hardest; and that was probably true. CIB men ranged themselves alongside the couple. Limm kept his arm round Doreen, even when they were close to a police car.

'They're all right,' Shaw said with satisfaction as they got in. 'What about coming to my place for a bit of breakfast, Handsome?'

'Luke, do you know what I'd like to do?'

Shaw grinned.

'Be on your own for a few hours, hey?'

'I might get rid of these nerves you say I've got.'

'Okay, okay. There'll be plenty of time to meet my better half. You've got a reservation at the Wentworth, it's the quietest of our big hotels. Soon going to be pulled down,' he added. 'There won't be any of old Sydney left, soon.'

The police car with Doreen and Limm turned out of the airport.

'In half an hour they'll be tucked up in a small hotel, which

will be guarded back and front,' said Shaw. 'No one else knows which hotel, so there can't be a reception party.'

Roger said quietly: 'Luke, so far they've managed to kill anyone they've set their minds on. We don't really know why, we don't know who's next on their list, if anyone. Until we've caught the two Barring brothers and we know the danger's over, I'm not going to rest easy. Are you?'

Shaw grinned.

'Maybe I'm harder-hearted than you,' he said. 'Maybe that's why I think every Blue Flag Line ship should be warned of danger – every Master compelled to have his vessel searched. We don't *know* that the *Koala* was blown up, we don't *know* that the *Kookaburra* will be – but the risk is great enough for action stations for my money. That's what I'm going to fight for at the conference.'

Roger nodded.

'Try to see it my own way,' Shaw urged. 'There are some papers in your room giving you a break-down on the Blue Flag Line and the men who run it. They'll all be at the conference, and if you think I'm a hard nut, you wait until you meet them.'

The room at the hotel overlooked a small, triangular green, and by craning his neck Roger could just see the top of the great arch of the bridge. After a shower and breakfast, he settled down to the documents, and was halfway through them when his telephone rang.

'Handsome, that conference has been put off until tomorrow,' Luke Shaw said. 'There's a big company fraud brewing up and I've got to spend time on it. Mortimer Flag's flown to Adelaide about some trouble with a cargo of hides. Like a man to show you round?'

'Let me find my own way,' Roger said.

'I can easily send a man —'

'I'd like to get the feel of this place,' Roger said, and meant it.

He spent much of the day walking, and took an occasional bus ride, using a map from the hotel. He went to the tall, silvery-walled Ocean House where the Blue Flag Line had its headquarters, the wharves, the Bridge lookout, the small private

hotel where Limm and Doreen were staying. All the time he felt a sense of urgency conflicting with a desire to see more and more of the city.

That night he had dinner at Luke Shaw's home near Manly, a small white house on a hill overlooking a small bay. Mrs Shaw, small, unexpectedly young looking and bright-eyed, cooked leg of lamb to rare succulence.

'I know you haven't done much today,' Luke said. 'But you'll benefit from it, Handsome. Any new ideas during the day?'

'They're simmering,' Roger said, and added under his breath: 'I hope.'

Next morning he stood looking at the triangle of green grass and shrubs, and farther away, the sweeping approaches to the Harbour Bridge; from here the bridge looked more man-made, more as if it belonged to the surroundings. He brooded for five minutes, then had a shower and ordered breakfast. He went back to the window, half wishing he could see a Blue Flag steamer.

He noticed a man strolling across the green, one of several who had been lounging and lazing there, night workers or layabouts. Roger moved away, then looked from one side of the window; the man was moving nearer, glancing towards the hotel. Roger felt his pulse racing. At this distance he couldn't be sure, but this looked like Marcus Barring. He went to his bag, took out a small pair of field-glasses, and reached the window again when there was a knock at the door.

'Come in!'

He focused the glasses on the man on the green as an elderly waiter came in with a tray.

Marcus Barring was, indeed, watching the hotel. There was now no doubt of his rather heavy features, the glasses even showed his pitted face.

Between grapefruit, bacon and eggs, toast and marmalade Roger kept looking out. Barring was still lounging, keeping to himself although more men were about now. Roger finished, deliberated, and decided not to call Shaw. Every now and again a chance had to be taken, and he decided to take one now. He opened the box again, put the glasses away, and took out a small, whippy cosh, the only weapon he carried wherever he went. He put this in his jacket pocket, and went downstairs and outside.

He strolled towards the Harbour Bridge, held up at the main road by the flow of morning rush-hour traffic. When he was safely across he strolled as far as he could towards the bridge, then turned back. Already his exploration of the city the day before was proving invaluable.

Barring was now across the road.

Roger strolled farther along, looking at the street map. There was a criss-cross of narrow streets, some leading down towards the river. He did not look round except at one corner, a deliberate appraisal of the old terraced houses and the trees. Barring was still behind him, dressed in pale-grey trousers and a loose-fitting sweater. Then he went on, along Kent Street, crossed several other turnings. It was summer warmth for him, already; he wished he could take his jacket off. He saw the masts and funnels of shipping down another side street, and walked to a bridge from which he could see a great stretch of the harbour. There were thirty or forty vessels in sight, and two of them had Blue Flag funnels. He went down a flight of stone steps towards the river but even on a small jetty jutting out into the water, he could not get near enough to see them clearly.

'I wonder if Luke's watching them.' He half regretted his decision not to call the Sydney man.

He told himself there was no need to wonder, that Luke Shaw was not a man to leave anything to chance. He actually smiled. Luke would pull out all the stops to show the Yard what Sydney could do.

Still smiling, Roger turned.

The man who had tried to knife Doreen Morrison in London was only ten yards behind him, right hand in his pocket, as if he held a knife.

# 16

# Braggart?

'SUPERINTENDENT BLOODY WEST,' Barring rasped. 'You didn't expect to see me, cobber, did you?'

Roger said equably: 'I hoped to, Barring.'

'Don't give me that.'

'I hoped to,' Roger repeated. 'From the moment I saw you from my window. Who told you I was at the Wentworth?'

'The birds,' jeered Barring. 'They'll take Shaw the news of your death, too.'

'Not for a long time,' Roger said. He put his hand to his jacket pocket; Barring watched very closely. He took out a packet of cigarettes, and some matches, lit up, and put cigarettes and matches back. He felt the smooth leather of the cosh, curled round inside. 'Let me tell you something. Wu Hong told us all about your generous payment for a murder which didn't come off. If you want hirelings to do their job properly, you ought to pay them better. You get paid enough.'

'And I'll get a bonus for killing you.' Barring kept his hand in his pocket; he seemed to clench it there.

'Kill me, and you'll have every policeman in Australia and England looking for you,' Roger said. 'You're in a bad enough jam as it is. Don't make it worse.'

'You've got a nerve!'

'Of course I've got a nerve,' Roger said impatiently. 'All coppers have to have. Why don't you take the one chance you've got?'

Barring didn't speak, but he looked puzzled. His eyes were a muddy brown, and he breathed through very thick lips. Together with his broad nostrils they seemed to indicate a touch of aboriginal blood. Suddenly, it flashed on Roger that this man was not unlike Lancelot Smith.

Roger took the cigarette from his mouth.

'It's probably your last chance,' he said. 'Please yourself.' He half turned.

'Don't move!' Barring ordered.

Roger turned back.

'Get this into your thick head. I'm not going to be frightened by you and I'll leave when I want to. If you use the knife you've got in your pocket you'll sign your own death warrant.' He half expected a harsh: '*And yours*,' but it didn't come. 'Make up your mind. You can save your neck – if you act soon enough.'

'I'll look after my own neck,' Barring said, but he was even more puzzled. 'Why don't you tell me what's on your mind, West?'

'Make a full statement, name the people you're working for, and give us evidence against them. It couldn't fail to make things easy for you.'

'You think you know a lot!'

Roger said: 'No one's going to hang me.'

Barring began to scowl.

Roger shrugged.

'No one hanged your brother Paul, but he's dead.'

Barring's eyes blazed.

'You bloody cops made him do that!'

'No, we didn't,' Roger said flatly. 'As far as we know, he killed himself. Didn't he know what was in that capsule he swallowed?'

'He knew,' Barring asserted as if he was quite sure. 'He knew and so did I. You don't know half as much as you think you do, copper. Let me tell *you* something. The Blue Flag Line finished my family. They killed my mother and damned near killed my Dad. They're a murdering lot of thieving swine, and before I've finished with them they won't have a ship left '

'Twenty-seven is a lot of ships to sink,' Roger said.

'Twenty-seven, fifty-seven, a hundred and seven – what difference does it make? I tell you there won't be a ship left of the Blue Flag Line.' Barring began to draw his hand out of his pocket 'And it won't make any difference to me whether I kill you or not. If it wasn't for you Paul would be alive, and if it wasn't for you I wouldn't be on the run. So I'm going to send you to Paul. Understand? No one gets away with killing a

Barring. When the Blue Flag swine swindled the Barring Line they started something they couldn't finish. As long as there's a single Barring left the Blue Flag will —'

Roger half turned again, his right hand at his pocket. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Barring flash the knife, and he dropped flat on to the hard ground. Would Barring throw or stab? Barring was leaping forward, surprised by Roger's move. Roger could see only his legs and feet, and could not tell whether the knife was being plunged downwards. He rolled over, kicking out at Barring's legs. He caught an ankle and heard the man gasp. He pulled the cosh out of his pocket, glimpsed Barring staggering away, with the knife still in his hand.

A man roared: '*What's going on?*'

Roger rolled over again, and sprang to his feet, cosh out. A big man in blue-grey uniform was running along the alley towards them, gun in hand. Barring flung the knife at him, and as he dodged, turned and raced away.

'Get him!' Roger gasped. 'That's Marcus Barring. Get him!'

The policeman hesitated, as if too startled to understand. He lost precious seconds, and Barring disappeared.

'I'm West,' Roger said, still gasping. 'Go get him.'

The policeman began to run. Roger backed against a post, drawing in deep, shuddering breaths. He would never know whether the policeman had baulked him of a capture or saved his life. At least he had talked to Marcus Barring, there was a lot he knew now and more he could guess.

Foosteps came clattering. Suddenly the sharp bark of a revolver shot sounded, loud and clear. So there was a chance that Barring would be caught. Roger heard shouts and more footsteps, and thought he heard a splash. If Barring dived into the harbour surely he wouldn't have a chance to get away.

Another policeman came hurrying. Roger straightened up, saw recognition dawn, and knew he would have no problem.

'Are you Superintendent *West*?'

'Yes. Show me what's going on, will you?'

'Trouble down by the Blue Flag Wharf,' the policeman said. 'This way, sir.' They hurried, the policeman always a few paces ahead, until they reached the point from which they could see a

arge expanse of harbour, dozens of ships alongside, hundreds of mall craft.

Ten minutes later, he learned that Barring had got away.

'You know what I'd call you if I let myself go, don't you?' Luke Shaw, looking as near-angry as he was ever likely to be, was in his big, airy office. Roger sat opposite him. 'I'm not sure I shouldn't let myself go, either.'

'Save your breath until the conference,' Roger said.

'Never mind the conference. If anything happens to you while you're in Australia, we'd never live it down.'

'I'll try to leave a parting message absolving you,' Roger said. 'Promote that policeman who heard me talking to Barring. He saved your reputation as well as my life.'

'Why the hell didn't you give me a call?'

'I thought you might have Barring followed.'

'I'd have sent a dozen men —' Shaw broke off, and his voice quietened. 'There must have been some reason in that bird-brain of yours. What was it?'

'I wanted to give Barring a chance to turn Queen's Evidence.'

'Against his *brother*?'

Roger said quietly: 'No, his employers. He may have a personal stake in this, but he's being paid, and so was his brother.'

'What *is* going on in your mind?' Shaw demanded.

'The same as in yours, or you wouldn't want all twenty-seven Blue Flag ships warned.'

Shaw put his head on one side, and began to smile.

'I ought to have known better than to try to fool you, didn't I? Of course it can't be the Barring brothers after the BF's blood. One ship, even two ships – but it's too big for a family like the Barrings.'

Roger nodded.

'Any ideas about who is behind it?' Shaw asked.

'Nothing worth calling an idea, except that this is costing a fortune. So it's a big money interest. And there's a measure of desperation in it – kill at all costs, whatever the risk. Family vengeance doesn't operate that way. A few murdered among top Blue Flag Line men, stabs in the dark, that kind of thing, yes. But something happened to trigger off the murders of the

*Kookaburra* passengers, something sudden, unexpected, urgent. That doesn't fit in with a family feud.'

Shaw raised both hands.

'I surrender,' he said. 'Too right it doesn't. I told you this was too complicated to pass on over the telephone and in reports. But don't make any mistake, Handsome. The Barrings hate the Blue Flag Line. They'll take any risks to get back at it. They may be in someone's pay but they're more than hired killers, they're doing this because they want to. When Marcus Barring says they'll gun for Blue Flag Line ships while there's one of them left, he means it.'

'Yes, I suppose so.'

'Suppose? It's a dead cert!'

'I had a feeling that when I offered him a chance to turn Queen's Evidence he thought about it,' Roger declared. 'If we can find a way of offering him the chance again he might take it. Luke, what do you think is behind it?'

'Someone wants to break the Blue Flag Line,' Shaw said. 'If we rule out the revenge motive, what have we got?'

'Tell me.'

'A take-over,' Shaw said flatly. 'Don't raise your voice, I know what you're going to say! Take-over boys will do any dirty trick to bring down share values before moving in, provided it's legal. They don't go in for wholesale murder.'

'Go on,' said Roger.

'There've been some queer rumours about some Australian-owned shipping lines,' Shaw told him. 'Rumours that Red China would like to buy control. Chinese ships can't trade freely, there are a lot of ports they can't go into, and a lot of cargo they can't carry. There isn't much ship-building going on in Chinese yards – it's mostly small stuff. The rumours say that the Chinese would like financial control of some shipping which doesn't carry its flag. They've gone into a lot of mining business in Ceylon and in the Far East, bought their way into a lot of unexpected places, too. We aren't certain, but we think one or two small Australian lines with associations with Hong Kong are Red-controlled. The Blue Flag Line is financed by about sixty per cent Australian – the Flags only – and forty per cent Hong Kong Chinese financiers. There is a lot of Communist in-

filtration into Hong Kong business and financial life. Fred Hodges gave me some dope on that. I told you he's busy trying to find out more about the Blue Flag Line office in Hong Kong, and he'll dig up plenty. Follow me, Handsome?'

Roger said slowly: 'I do indeed.'

'You don't sound very convinced.'

'Give me time,' Roger said. 'Red China being so ruthless in getting what she wants, she would be prepared to kill a lot of people to get control. Is that the argument?'

'Are you denying it?'

'Not that it's possible,' Roger agreed quickly. 'I need a lot of convincing that they'd do it while there's any chance of it being traced back to them.'

'They don't think there is,' Shaw argued. 'If the Barrings have been caught by the Communist bug, that would explain a lot. Why Paul Barring and Lancelot Smith killed themselves rather than be caught, for instance. They didn't trust themselves not to talk, and the Cause was greater than themselves.' He paused, but Roger did not speak. Shaw continued: 'What do you think, Handsome?'

'Convinced of all this?' Roger demanded.

Shaw grinned.

'No, but it looks the likeliest theory to me. See any rational argument against it as a theory?'

'No.'

'We're going to get along,' Shaw said, in his half-mocking, half-jocular way. 'See why I want every ship warned? Practically all of them – correction – *all* of the ships have Chinese crews, most of them are a hundred per cent Chinese below officer rank. If there's going to be another loss like the *Koala*, it might be any one of the ships. The most obvious thing would be for a member of the crew to blow the vessel up.'

'And himself?' Roger objected.

'You don't have much to do with Johnny Chinaman,' Shaw declared. 'A lot of them are absolute fatalists. They like to think their families are all looked after, but death doesn't worry them. They live too close to it all their lives. Add political fanaticism, and there's your answer.'

Roger said: 'It certainly could be. You've sold me on one thing, anyhow.'

'What's that?'

'Any one of the Blue Flag Line ships could be in danger, anywhere in the world.'

Shaw's eyes lit up.

'You'll support me when I ask for all ships to be warned.'

'Yes.'

'I knew it was right to have you down-under.' Shaw clapped his hands together with a loud bang. 'Good on you, Handsome!' After a moment he went on: 'Wouldn't like to have a word with the Commissioner now, would you?'

'Let's see if the Blue Flag directors will co-operate first,' Roger said.

'Have it your own way,' conceded Shaw He opened a file on his desk. 'Now lemme see – ah, here it is. The *Kookaburra* took on the Great Barrier Reef pilot at Thursday Island at six o'clock this morning. They'll be four days coming down to Sydney. All's well on board – the pilot was briefed by the Queensland chaps to do a bit of checking. All the passengers are fit, including the Parrishes.'

Roger conceded: 'That's something.'

'There's a cable in from your chap Kebble, too.'

Roger sat up.

'Samuel Hackett has given notice of marriage to a woman named Thérèse Donet in Tours, France.'

'Well I'm damned!'

'Doesn't leave him in the clear,' Shaw said almost smugly. 'But it gave me an idea, Handsome.'

'About what?'

'The murders in London and Hong Kong.'

'Go on.'

'All the passengers known to be coming back to Australia were killed – except the Parrishes. Could that be part of the motive – to kill 'em so as to make sure they couldn't get back here?'

Roger said softly: 'It certainly could. I'd missed it.'

'It puts the Parrishes on the spot,' Shaw said.

'It also puts Doreen Morrison on the spot,' Roger said. 'It

ought to put Limm on it, too.' He leaned forward intently. 'Anything known about Limm yet?'

'He seems to be what he says he is,' answered Shaw, opening a letter. 'A sheep farmer from Cowra. Born there, inherited the farm, never been out of Australia before.' He pushed a sheet of paper across the desk. 'That's a description sent from Cowra. They haven't located a photograph yet but they hope to get it here before the day's out – they'll fly it here if necessary. Judging from that description there isn't much doubt Limm's really Limm, is there?'

'Just enough though,' Roger argued.

'The photo will put it beyond any doubt,' Shaw said confidently. 'The Morrison girls are certainly what they said. So are the Parrishes, although we can't trace Jack Parrish farther back than five years He settled in Northern Queensland, saying he'd come from South Australia, but no one knows where – yet. Old Sam Hackett came from Western Australia, up near Broome – lost his wife about ten years ago, and turned up in Perth to live on his own. We haven't been able to trace him farther back – yet,' repeated Shaw. 'He hasn't any relations, and he told his neighbours that all his friends had died, that was why he went South We're busy on it, and the Western Australia fellows are always on the ball. Sheldon was what he claimed to be, though – insurance agent, unmarried. He had one sister living, no other close relatives. Nothing in his business life to make us suspicious. He put his few belongings into storage – nothing among them to suggest he wasn't what he said he was. He was in shipping and general insurance – worked for a broker in a good way of business. They carried some of the *Koala* loss – but so did dozens of others.'

Roger said: 'So it's narrowing down.'

'So is our time for that conference,' Shaw said. 'Let's go and have a steak, and then get moving.'

# 17

# Conference With V.I.P.S

'BEN,' DOREEN MORRISON said in the husky voice which reflected the nervous tension under which she lived these days, 'when is it going to end?'

'It won't be long ' Limm tried to reassure her.

'That's what you keep on saying.'

'It *can't* be much longer.'

She turned away from him and looked over Hyde Park The private hotel was near Liverpool and Oxford Streets, a clean, pleasant place in a good central position. They had adjoining but not communicating rooms. Along the passage, at the landing, a policeman was on duty all the time. Outside, back and front, there were other policemen. The sun shone on the tops of the trees, and on the grass, but not into this room, which faced east.

It was early afternoon.

'If only we knew why it was happening.' A querulous note sounded in Doreen's voice, and there was tightness at her lips; her eyes seemed to hold resentment as well as fear.

'Dorry, my sweet, you must know —'

'Don't keep saying I know!' cried Doreen.

'The secret must be hidden in your mind,' insisted Limm doggedly. 'They wouldn't try to kill you for no reason at all Paul Barring was positive someone had told you incriminating things about him – if only you could remember.'

'*There isn't anything!*' Doreen raised her voice, and there was a wild look in her eyes 'There just can't be.'

'If only we could hit on it —'

'You can't hit on something which doesn't exist!'

'If you would keep on talking about yourself, where you've been, whom you've talked to, you'd suddenly remember some significant thing,' went on Limm doggedly. 'It's the only way.'

'You keep on saying that and I keep on trying!' Tears seemed to shimmer in her eyes 'You keep on making me think of what happened when I was with Denise on the ship, and I want to forget. Can't you understand? I don't want to remember the *Kookaburra*, or anything that happened on it. I just want to forget.'

'Yes, I know,' Limm said, gently but quite firmly. 'You don't want to remember, so you don't remember. But if you could recall it just once and get it out of your system you could forget it for the rest of your life.' When she didn't speak, just stared at him with her eyes brimming over, he went on: 'You'd feel much better for it, Dorry. While you lock it up in your mind it festers like a sore.'

She screwed up her eyes.

'You're only saying this because that man West asked me to remember.'

'I'm not,' Limm told her positively. 'I have strong personal reasons for wanting to know. Dorry, listen. Something you and Denise saw or heard on board that ship almost certainly explains the attacks. Sheldon must have heard it, too, and Neil Sanderson – the First Engineer. You remember Neil. It was probably said when you were all together, having drinks, or having a swim some time. If you could remember it would be like exorcizing a devil.'

'All right,' Doreen said huskily. 'I'll try. I absolutely hate it, because I keep having to think about Denise, and it hurts so much. Can't you understand?'

'You'll never know how much I understand,' Limm said. He put his arms round her, held her tightly, and put his lips close to her ear. 'Or how much I long to help.'

'Good afternoon, gentlemen,' said Luke Shaw. 'Superintendent West of Scotland Yard made it all right. Mr West, this is Mr Raymond Flag, the Chairman of the board.'

Raymond Flag was tall, youthful looking, in spite of silvery hair, quite handsome, with a boardroom manner, and a Savile Row look about his clothes. His handshake was firm, his palm cool.

'I am grateful for your readiness to help, Superintendent.'

'I'm here to try,' Roger said.

'My brother, Gregory, is the Managing Director of the Company,' Raymond Flag said.

Gregory was shorter, thickset, dark haired, forty-ish; a piece of human granite. His handclasp was like the grip of a vice. His fingers had corns and callouses, his face had the weatherbeaten look of the week-end sailor.

'How are you?'

'How're you?' murmured Roger.

'And our cousin, Mortimer Flag, the Company's secretary,' Raymond said. 'You see, the Blue Flag Line is kept in the family.' Mortimer was the youngest, yet running to fat; a good-time boy, Roger thought, fair-haired and pale-faced, but with intelligent eyes despite a weak mouth.

'Do you have absolute control?' asked Roger.

'We have sixty per cent. The rest is shared between our shareholders in Hong Kong and London,' answered Raymond. 'Come and sit down, Superintendent.'

They were in a narrow room, obviously a boardroom. A long window almost filled one wall, with magnificent views over the harbour, perfect today with fleecy clouds in a rich blue, sunlit sky. Eight chairs were gathered about an oval table, and a quick glance told Roger that each chair was different. He made no comment. They all sat down, the Flags obviously in their accustomed places with Raymond in the middle and a Flag on either side of him. Roger and Shaw sat opposite them. In the middle of the figured walnut table was an inlaid map of Australia.

'Is the Commissioner coming?' asked Raymond.

'He couldn't make it,' Shaw said.

'A pity. Well, Superintendent' – Raymond looked at Shaw, not Roger – 'I am sure you are as anxious as I to get to business.'

'My word, yes.' Shaw was almost too emphatic. 'Right down.'

'Have you any progress to report?'

'Some.' Shaw was laconic as he gave details of the attack on Doreen at Hong Kong, and the attack on Roger that morning. All three directors switched their gaze towards Roger. 'So we know they're still frightened of the girl, and don't particularly

want the Yard to interfere.' Shaw looked bland. 'I can understand that, can't you?'

'I don't yet understand why Mr West is here.' Mortimer sounded peevish. 'Until you arrived these crimes all took place outside this country, didn't they?'

'I'm puzzled, too.' Gregory spoke with a bluntness which suited his solid figure. 'These were murders committed in England.'

'They were indeed ' Raymond spread his hands over the desk and the bright polish reflected a gold ring on the little finger of the left hand. 'Is there any reason why these crimes should not have had their origin in England? Our resident manager, Lancelot Smith, appears to have felt some responsibility and conceivably connived at the crimes. We have no information about that but consider it most unlikely.'

Shaw frowned. Roger sat silent.

'Marcus Barring is wanted for murder and attempted murder, and he came right here to Sydney,' Shaw said carefully.

'Couldn't the New South Wales Police have handled that on their own?' inquired Mortimer. Fat and good-time boy he might be, but he was also waspish. 'Scotland Yard's responsibility is surely in England, where the crimes were committed. Even the alleged crime at Hong Kong is on a Crown Colony, not in Australia.'

Shaw glanced at Roger, who still didn't speak. The attack – and it was an attack – seemed to embarrass Shaw, and he moistened his lips. His voice was gruff.

'We came here to discuss the best thing to do to protect your ships,' he said. 'Not try to shelve responsibility.'

'*We're* not shelving any responsibility.' Mortimer Flag eased his spotless white collar from his pink neck.

'The truth is, Superintendent,' Raymond interpolated, speaking mildly and looking so straight at Shaw that it seemed as if he was pretending that Roger wasn't there, 'we have spent most of the morning discussing this affair. It appears that one officer of our ships – a man to whom we once had some obligation – was dismissed for bad conduct His brother, who was a member of the crew, left in protest. Such things have happened before, and doubtless will again. Apparently these men had some reason

for hostility to some of the ship's passengers while in England – not to officers or crew, but to passengers. We have come to the conclusion that this is not necessarily connected with the Blue Flag Line, unless you can prove that it is.'

He still avoided Roger's eyes.

'I say it is,' Shaw asserted roughly. 'I say that what happened to the *Koala* could happen to the *Kookaburra*.'

'And I say that is nonsense.' Raymond Flag's voice was icy.

'It's guff, that's what – plain guff.' Gregory shifted his position.

'As the legal authority on the board I have no hesitation in saying that this is guesswork, with no basis in fact,' Mortimer stated. 'Coming from anyone else it would most certainly be dangerously near slander and defamation.'

Shaw's look at Roger seemed to hold appeal, saying it was past time Roger interrupted. Roger sat silent, glancing from man to man, each of whom studiously avoided looking at him, quite sure what he should do.

Shaw took the bull by the horns.

'So you won't co-operate. Is that it?'

'Give us one single reason – valid reason – why we should co-operate and we will do everything we can to help,' Raymond said smoothly. 'Until we have it there is nothing we can do.'

'Nothing you *will* do, you mean?' Shaw was nearly out of temper.

Gregory pushed his chair back and stood up.

'Don't be so damned rude. There's nothing we can do because we think you're trying to use us to pull Scotland Yard's coals out of the fire. My God! If the rumour spread around that you thought one of our ships —'

'*All* of your ships, gentlemen.' Roger spoke for the first time, so unexpectedly that he startled the others.

'You're out of your mind!' Gregory almost shouted. 'If this rumour gets around, what do you think will happen to our stocks? They'll go down with a bang. What do you think will happen to our customers? They'll find other ships. It's difficult enough to get business as things are – with this, it would be ten times worse.'

'As it was with the Barring Line before you made them bankrupt,' Roger put in.

'It's happened to a dozen shipping companies. It isn't going to happen to this one.'

'I wonder.' Roger smiled at Shaw and stood up. 'We'd better go, Luke.'

'Aren't you going to say *any*thing?' Shaw was angry for a different reason now.

'Perhaps Mr West has nothing to say,' Raymond Flag put in sarcastically.

'Not to you, gentlemen,' Roger said. 'As the Blue Flag Line won't co-operate, we'll obviously have to find someone who will. Those ships have to be warned. There are about four thousand human beings on them, and even if you're not interested in capital loss, other people will be very interested in the loss of human lives.'

'There's no one else you can go to,' Mortimer said; he was pulling at his collar.

Roger grinned at Shaw.

'Apparently Mr Flag hasn't heard of the power of the Press. But we really ought to get along. It's getting late.' He put a hand on Luke's arm and they turned away. For a moment there was utter silence, and even Luke seemed baffled. Then Roger saw his face split into a grin, and he snorted and smothered a laugh. He opened the door as Raymond Flag called out:

'Are you threatening us?'

Roger swung round on his heel. He felt completely on top of the situation but as he raised his voice his lips twisted, as if he could hardly control his anger.

'No I am not threatening you. I am telling you that in my considered opinion there is lethal danger to one or more ships of your line, and there is no way of finding out which one without your co-operation. So I am going to cable my office in London, and release the story of the danger to the ships. I shall ask all public authorities to co-operate in warning the ships' masters. The London papers will pick the story up within a few hours, all Australian papers will have it in the morning. If that's the kind of publicity you want, that's what you'll get. Your ships must be warned one way or the other.'

He turned back to the door.

'Good on you,' Luke Shaw whispered.

'You have not yet convinced us that a warning is necessary,' Raymond Flag insisted, but there was a placatory note in his voice. 'Come and discuss this reasonably.'

'Oh, no,' Roger said. 'Superintendent Shaw used plenty of reason, and you flatly refused to listen. Either we warn the ships through your normal channels by sending coded instructions to the masters for a complete search of each ship for concealed explosives, or we do it through the Press in plain English. Which is it to be?'

The three Flags, Gregory standing, the others sitting, looked at one another with silent admissions of defeat Raymond made a good effort at least to restore some dignity to the directors' position.

'If the police are so convinced that this is necessary, we will of course co-operate. How soon can you have the message ready for coding?'

Luke Shaw, poker-faced, his jubilation showing only in his eyes, dipped his hand into his pocket, and pulled out a folded sheet of paper.

'Here it is,' he said.

Every master of a Blue Flag Line ship received the message by radio that day. Ships in the Indian Ocean, the Pacific, the Atlantic, ships in ports as far apart as London, New Orleans, Hong Kong, Saigon, Buenos Aires, Colombo, Fremantle, and Sydney, all had the message. It read:

> Reason to believe attempt to sink your ship might be made by member of passengers or crew. Carry out comprehensive search for explosive immediately and radio result to Police Headquarters Sydney and a copy to Ocean House.

'Every ship will report all clear,' Mortimer Flag said as Roger and Shaw checked over the list of ships and places. 'Perhaps you'll then admit that it's a waste of time.'

'Let's wait for the result, shall we?' Shaw said bluffly. 'Now what we want to know is whether any of you can give us an idea what it's all about.'

'We do not think the ships are in danger,' Raymond said coldly. 'So we certainly can't help you there.'

'You don't think the Barring family is gunning for you, do you?'

'We do not,' said Raymond. 'That is an old affair. We paid the old man a sum in compensation, purely *ex gratia*, and gave those of his sons who wanted a position the security they needed. There is no reason at all to believe that they are carrying out any vendetta.'

'Lancelot Smith killed himself,' Roger reminded him. 'You've seen a note of the statement he made before he died.'

'Lancelot Smith suffered from delusions,' Raymond declared, still coldly 'We had no reason to think that they affected his general efficiency. It was Smith who supervised our take-over of the Barring Line. He always felt some degree of responsibility. Paul and Marcus Barring made some threats against him, and he was nervous from then on. That is why we sent him to the London office.'

'He stated quite positively that what happened to the *Koala* could happen to any ship in the line,' Roger pointed out.

'He believed the Barrings sank the *Koala* No one else did He roused the suspicions, and as a result there was a delay in the findings of the Court of Inquiry, but the findings, when promulgated, were quite clear; there was no evidence as to the cause. The two Barring brothers ran a launch service at the Great Barrier Reef, and their launches crossed the *Koala*'s course. Certainly there was no evidence against the Barrings; had there been, presumably the police would have acted.'

'We'd have acted,' Shaw growled.

Five minutes afterwards the two detectives left the office; no one shook hands, the atmosphere was cold, almost hostile. They were in a police car outside the office when Shaw spoke thoughtfully, his jubilation gone.

'They seemed pretty sure of themselves, Handsome. We couldn't have fooled ourselves, could we?' When Roger didn't answer, Shaw went on: 'If we get an all clear from every ship, it will look as if they know what they're at. If I'd stuck my neck out like you did yours, they would be after my blood.'

'They can't get at mine so easily,' Roger said mildly.

They settled down, and the chauffeur leaned over and handed a large envelope to Shaw.

'That was delivered half an hour ago, sir. The messenger said it was urgent.'

Shaw ripped the envelope open, found a photograph, and pulled it out. It was the right way up, and both men stared at an unfamiliar face but one which was vaguely like Limm's.

A typewritten note on the back said: *Benjamin Limm, of Cowra, N.S.W. Now prospecting in North Western Australia.*

'You see that?' breathed Shaw. 'Our man isn't Limm.'

'Let's get to his hotel, fast,' said Roger.

## 18

# Arrest

THE POLICEMAN AT the front of the little hotel looked drowsy in the afternoon sun, but he straightened up and was alert enough when Shaw and Roger got out of the car and hurried towards him.

'They're both inside,' he volunteered.

'Got eyes at the back, too?' demanded Shaw.

'I'd have been told if they'd left, wouldn't I?'

'I hope so,' Shaw said forbiddingly.

He led the way in. There was no one in the small office, but a notice said: '*Ring for Service*'. They went upstairs. A policeman at the second landing said:

'All okay, sir.'

'Heard anything from them?'

'He's in her room again – spends most of his time there.' The man grinned. 'Golden opportunity, I'd say.'

'No one asked you,' Shaw said short-temperedly.

Roger felt the tightening of tension which had been with him so often since the finding of Denise Morrison's body. On the way, misgiving had crowded his mind, too. He would not suffer personally if the Blue Flag Line ships reported all clear, but it

would create other problems, and the Flags certainly wouldn't co-operate. He even began to ask himself whether it was possible that Lancelot Smith had suffered from delusions, and whether these killings were divorced from the ships entirely.

They reached the girl's door, which was marked 9.

Shaw banged on it.

There was no immediate response, but a curious kind of noise, almost like a gasp. Then springs, as of a bed, creaked and twanged. Shaw knocked again.

'Who is it?' the man posing as Benjamin Limm called. He sounded out of breath, and now there were other sounds; as of scuffling.

'Superintendent Shaw. I want to talk to you.'

'Come back in five minutes,' Limm called.

'Open this door in two minutes flat or I'll break it down.'

The girl's voice sounded: *'What can they want?'*

Limm didn't answer. Roger heard a soft footfall on the far side of the door and instinctively braced himself. So did Shaw. The door opened inwards, so it couldn't be banged in their faces but Limm might have read the danger signals, and be preparing to rush them.

He stood in the doorway, face dusky red with anger. He had on his trousers, socks, and shirt.

'What the hell do you want?'

'To know who you are,' Shaw said curtly. 'Cut out the indignation If you and the girl decide to have a tumble it's no business of ours. What matters is keeping her alive. What's your name?'

'Benjamin Limm?' asked Roger. 'Or is it Solomon Barring?'

'Solomon *Barring*!' gasped Doreen.

All the anger drained out of the man's face. Roger realized that he had not anticipated the discovery even after the peremptory call. His colour faded, the aggressiveness in his powerful body died away into consternation.

'Oh no,' Doreen whispered. 'No.'

'You won't alter facts —' Shaw began, but Roger gripped his arm, and he stopped immediately. The two men were on the same wave-length in most things, as Roger had learned when Shaw had visited London.

Benjamin Limm, alias Solomon Barring, turned away from then and looked at Doreen. There was something almost pathetic in his attitude. He held his arms out towards her, but not at full length, it was as if he expected a rebuff.

'Dorry, it's not what you think,' he said hoarsely. 'It is not anything like that.'

'You're their brother. And they killed Denise. And I —' Doreen broke off, and looked as if she would burst into tears. Then suddenly fury exploded inside her, she was touched with surpassing beauty as she flung herself at the man. 'You devil!' she cried in a shrill, penetrating voice. 'You devil.'

She struck Solomon Barring in the face, and struck and struck again. He stood without giving ground. She struck again and again until red weals showed, and redder scratches, too, but her lover did not yield at all. The girl raised her hands to strike still more but suddenly dropped them. She turned away from the rumpled bed and stood staring at the wall.

'Dorry,' Solomon Barring said, 'please listen.'

'I don't want to hear.'

'Dorry —'

'Go away! I hope I never see you again.'

Solomon Barring closed his eyes. He seemed oblivious of the two detectives, of everything except this girl. His lips opened but no words came and he closed them again Slowly, painfully, he turned away and approached Roger and Shaw. It was a movement of submission, of absolute defeat. He did not speak but gave a little jerky nod.

'I want your explanation,' Roger said.

'Not – not here.'

'Yes, here.'

The man began to show fight.

'No. Let's get out.'

'You can't have it all your own way,' Shaw said. 'We're in a hurry You're Solomon Barring.'

'Yes, I am.'

'Why pretend you were someone else?'

'Because – because I didn't want to sail on a Blue Flag ship under my own name.'

'Why take Limm's?' Roger demanded.

'For God's sake let's talk about this in the car – anywhere but not here.'

'Just talk,' Shaw ordered harshly.

Solomon Barring looked as if he would throw himself at them, would do anything to get away, but they blocked his path, two tall and powerful men. He glanced round at the girl, but all she did was to cross to the bed and sit down, her back to the men.

'I believed my brothers were planning some crime against the *Kookaburra*,' Solomon said at last. His voice was very hoarse. 'Something Paul said one night when he'd had too much to drink made me suspicious. Neither of them would tell me anything.' He paused as if he were physically weary, and standing was an ordeal. 'At the time of the take-over I hated the Blue Flag Line as much as they did, but I couldn't keep on hating. They could That's why I moved out to the country, away from Sydney. We didn't meet very often, but whenever we did the subject always came up, and they seemed to get worse instead of better.'

'What was your father's attitude?' asked Roger.

'Dad? He just gave up,' Solomon said. 'The Blue Flag Line gave him a kind of golden handshake, enough to keep him in comfort Losing the ships hurt him in a lot of ways, but it didn't turn him bad. The worst thing it did was to kill my mother – the worry of it was too much for her At one time it looked as if the whole family would be without a penny, and Mum and Dad had inherited the Line from their families, it was everything to them. Dad couldn't get a grip on himself for a long time. He went up to the North Coast of Western Australia, did a bit of fishing and played around with the mother-of-pearl business, but it was years before he was anything like himself again. It hurt me to see him. It made my brothers mad That's the truth – it drove them *mad*. All they could ever think of was revenge.'

Solomon stopped, moistened his lips, and shifted his feet. Doreen was still sitting on the bed, but twisted round, staring at Solomon. Roger stretched out for an upright chair, and pushed it near Solomon.

'I'm all right,' Solomon said roughly. He squared his shoulders and stood to his full height. 'I heard from a friend in

Sydney that they'd got these jobs on the *Kookaburra*, and I didn't like the sound of it. I always had a sneaking fear that they'd had something to do with the loss of the *Koala* They were running a launch service to Heyman Island at the time, and were less than fifty miles from the spot where she foundered. They wouldn't talk about their reasons for sailing with the *Kookaburra*, so I booked a passage I borrowed Ben Limm's passport – just stuck my photograph in place of his Ben is prospecting for uranium up near Cape York, and didn't need it. The issue stamping was about right, and no one ever noticed it. I didn't want Paul and Marcus to know in advance. They didn't know I was on board until we'd been at sea the better part of a day.'

'What did they do?' Roger asked.

'They told me I was wrong to be suspicious, and they were going to work for Blue Flag in future. They said they'd got over their thirst for revenge.'

'Did you believe them?'

'No.'

'Did you see any evidence of what they were planning?'

'I don't really know,' Solomon said, heavily. He looked round at Doreen, as if the way she was now staring at him had made him sensitive. The expression in his eyes grew brighter and his voice became stronger. 'At the end of the voyage Paul was seen entering passengers' cabins, and he had a passenger's wallet in his own berth. The passenger wouldn't make a charge, and Paul had to leave the ship at Southampton. Marcus went with him. They'd talked big to Denise and Doreen on the ship, and I tried to discourage the girls, but they wouldn't listen. When I saw Denise's photograph in the newspaper, I just had to know what had happened to Doreen, so I came and saw you. I couldn't tell all the truth but I told as much of it as I could. I didn't believe Paul was a murderer. I can hardly believe it even now.'

Doreen stood up from the bed, very slowly.

'You said you didn't really know if you saw any evidence against your brothers,' Roger said.

'I thought possibly they'd decided to steal from the passengers, making things as unpleasant for the line as possible,' Solomon said. 'Now it's obvious there was more to it than that, and entering cabins and stealing that wallet may have had some-

thing to do with it. As for why they killed Denise and tried to kill Doreen, and why they killed Sheldon – I simply don't know. In London —' He hesitated again, and glanced round; Doreen was within arm's reach. He stretched out, and she took his hand. 'In London I simply didn't know what to do. I told you who – who Denise was. I hoped – I prayed – that my brothers had nothing to do with her murder, but now I know they had. The one thing I could do was try to help Doreen I felt sure she must know why it had happened even if she didn't realize it. You' – he looked at Roger – 'you asked me to try to make her talk, but I didn't need any persuasion. She can't remember anything that might help, that's the hell of it Can you, Dorry?'

'If only I could,' she said. Her voice was stronger and her manner had a new self-assurance. 'I've racked my brains but I can't think of a thing anyone told me about those two Ben' – she did not seem to realize that she used his false name – 'why didn't you tell me?'

'Would you really have believed me?' Solomon asked. 'Would it really have been better to know who I was? I wanted to make you remember, because it seemed the only way I could save you from harm.'

His manner, his eyes, his voice, all added: 'Because I love you so much.'

'Just one more question,' Roger said. 'Do you know why your brothers didn't attack you?'

After a long silence, Solomon Barring answered: 'They wouldn't kill me. That's the last thing they'd do. The family mattered so much to them. They wouldn't kill me in any circumstances. They'd take it for granted I wouldn't harm them, either.' He squared his shoulders 'You'll make sure Doreen is safe while I'm away, won't you?'

'Where are you planning to go?' asked Luke Shaw.

'Aren't you going to take me with you?'

'We're going to watch you closely, and we want you to stay here until we've cleared up some points,' Luke said. 'So far we may have suspicion but we haven't any case against you.'

'The best thing you can do is to try to jog Doreen's memory,' Roger said emphatically. 'Even a word or two might be enough to help us. One question, now.'

'Yes?'

'Do you know where we might find your brother Marcus?'

'If I did I'd take you to him,' Solomon Barring declared. 'I haven't the faintest idea.'

It was some time before either Shaw or Roger spoke, when they had left the room. Roger felt strangely affected both by the story and by the reconciliation between the man and Doreen. There was some quality about their obvious love for each other which had a humbling effect on him.

'I think he was telling the truth,' said Shaw abruptly, when they were in the hotel hall.

'It would surprise me if he wasn't,' Roger admitted 'How soon can you check with the real Limm?'

'Shouldn't take long,' Shaw said. 'I'll get it started as soon as I'm back in the office. You any ideas?'

'My only idea is to speed up the answers from those ships,' Roger said.

'Should be coming in by now.' Shaw stepped on to the pavement of Liverpool Street and saw the mass of home-going traffic between them and the park, screwed up his nose and remarked: 'Be quicker to walk than take the car.'

'Suits me,' said Roger. 'Do you know what we haven't had time to do?'

'Digest the developments of the conference with the Flags,' answered Shaw, with a nod. 'We'll have to see what the old subconscious has done for us. When you called their bluff they caved in pretty quick.'

'Too quick?' wondered Roger.

'Don't be cryptic. Tell you what,' went on Shaw, 'let's shut up until we're back in the office. We can't talk here.'

He was right. The pavements were thicker with people than the roads with cars. There was the constant hum of engines, clatter of footsteps, medley of other noises. Shaw kept just ahead, and Roger had difficulty in keeping pace, so many people got in their path. It was relaxing in a way – physical exertion and stimulation yet a rest for his mind. They seemed to be walking past shops for a long time until they came to the narrow street which led to the police headquarters. This was almost

empty, a temporary backwater. They turned into the crowded parking place of the building and went up in a lift which crawled. Shaw drummed his fingers on the back of his hand, betraying his impatience. They got out at the third floor, and walked straight to his office. It was empty The papers on the desk were tidy, and on top of one file was a pencilled note, much as Kebble would have left it in Roger's office. Almost indifferently Shaw picked it up and read it. The change in his manner was astounding.

'The bloody swine,' he rasped. 'Marcus Barring rang up, and sent a message to you *and* me.' Roger streaked across the room, and read as Shaw went on: 'He says the *Kookaburra* will never tie up again And if I know Barring, he means it.'

## 19

# Messages From Ships At Sea

As Roger read and Luke Shaw talked, a man appeared at the doorway. Roger noticed him first. He was a stranger, tall and well-dressed, Raymond Flag in build and appearance but in a less unctuous way. He looked very alert as he came in, iron-grey hair brushed straight back from a broad forehead. His eyes were deepset, very brilliant blue.

Luke Shaw snapped almost to attention.

'Good evening, sir.'

'Hallo, Luke.' The newcomer advanced towards Roger, hands outstretched; a remembered photograph and Luke's manner told Roger this was Hugh Petherell, the Commissioner of Police for New South Wales. 'Sorry I couldn't meet you earlier, Superintendent.' His handclasp was very firm. 'You've talked to Marcus Barring, I understand. Do you think this is a genuine message or a hoax?'

'I think he thinks that what he says is true,' answered Roger.

*'Thinks?'*

'He believes the *Kookaburra* will sink before she ties up again.'

'Wouldn't he know for certain?'

'I don't see how we can be sure that he does,' reasoned Roger. 'I'd take it very seriously indeed.'

'My God, so would I,' Luke breathed.

The Commissioner was looking at Roger, now unsmiling.

'I'm told you persuaded the Flags to make a decision they had no liking for,' he said. 'So if there is trouble on board the *Kookaburra,* a search should reveal it. If it doesn't, the Flags will say the whole thing is a hoax aimed at their good name and their goodwill.'

'Do they know about this message?'

'No,' Petherell said. 'I telephoned Raymond Flag to tell him that I had reason to believe there was danger, that is all. How widespread is your search for Marcus Barring, Luke?'

'As wide as I can make it.'

'Statewide, do you mean?'

'Nationwide.'

'We must find him,' Petherell said. 'The search must have absolute priority.' Obviously he was deeply worried. 'What have you new for me?'

He sat on a corner of the desk, expectantly. Shaw reported the interview with the Flags and the development with Solomon Barring. Petherell frowned in concentration throughout that story.

'And you left Solomon Barring at the hotel?'

'Yes.'

'Get him here,' Petherell demanded. 'There's no way of being sure that he's telling the truth.' There was an edge of reprimand in his voice. 'One of his brothers sacrificed his life, so did Lancelot Smith. Solomon might murder this girl knowing he can't get away with it. Bring him in at once and hold him for questioning.'

Luke looked at Roger, in a kind of sardonic appeal.

'What do you think, Handsome?'

'It can't do any harm even if I don't think it will do any good,' Roger conceded.

'It will make sure that we don't lose Doreen Morrison by our own neglect,' Petherell said decisively. 'That's a chance I'm not going to take.'

Luke Shaw's hand was already on the telephone.

'I quite understand why you have to do this,' Solomon Barring said 'It doesn't alter the fact that I have told you the whole truth.'

'Haven't you any idea at all where we might find your brother?' Roger demanded.

'None at all.'

'No old haunts or familiar places?'

'None that aren't known to anybody The Surf Club, the Sydney Yacht Club, the Skin Divers Club – but he couldn't hide out in any of these.'

'Any girl friends? Women friends?'

'No steadies Marcus always took his pleasures where he could find them,' Solomon Barring said bitterly. 'If I could help you I would. You can't want to see this thing through more than I do.'

'Did your brother have many friends?'

'He hasn't been in Sydney much for the past ten years. I doubt if he's seen any of his old friends since we had to sell out. Not that he ever had many friends. He always had to do everything better than anyone else, which didn't exactly make him popular.'

'All the same we'd better question as many as we can,' Luke said. He was smarting under Petherell's implied rebuke. 'Make out a list, will you?'

'If I must,' Solomon said. 'Superintendent —'

'Yes?'

'Don't let anything happen to Doreen.'

'She's under full protection.'

'She'd better be.'

'Barring, hasn't she recollected anything to give a clue?' Roger asked.

'Nothing – absolutely nothing,' Solomon assured him with obvious conviction. 'I don't think she will, now. I'm beginning to wonder whether there was anything for her to remember.'

'So am I,' Roger said softly. 'There may be a way to find out. We missed it earlier. Can you call on a good psychiatrist to probe into her mind?' he added to Shaw.

'Can do,' Shaw answered at once. 'We may have missed it but we haven't had much time. I'll fix it If Doreen hasn't got anything to remember it would make nonsense of the whole affair.' After a moment's hesitation he turned away. 'I must get cracking. Don't miss anyone off that list of old-time friends of your brother, Barring.'

'They won't do anything to Ben, will they?' Doreen Morrison hadn't yet fully accepted her lover's new identity. 'He told you the truth, I'm sure he did.'

'I think so too,' Roger reassured her. 'And if he did, he's in no danger from the police. Doreen, do you realize what might be at stake?'

'The *Kookaburra*, and everyone on it.'

'Or an even bigger ship,' Roger said. 'We're going to get a psychiatrist to try to help you. Co-operate in every possible way, won't you? It will not only help the ship, it might help to prove that Ben is telling the truth '

Jack and Jill Parrish stood on the deck of the *Kookaburra*, early next morning, Saturday, arms about each other as if the moon, not the rising sun, was spreading light over them. Near by, three sailors were checking the provisions in a lifeboat.

'Three more days and three more nights' Jack Parrish said. He was looking at his young wife's profile. 'Then a week in Sydney and a last shopping spree, before life among the bananas!'

'Don't make me eat too many,' Jill said. 'Darling, did you notice anything strange yesterday?'

'No. Did you?'

'There seemed such a bustle among the crew – and our cabin hasn't been cleaned so thoroughly since we came aboard.'

'Spring cleaning, because the VIPs might come aboard for an inspection,' Jack said. 'They're even going over the lifeboats again, although they checked them just out of Hong Kong. Just as well they're thorough.'

Marcus Barring, unaware of the fact that over the years his hatred of the Blue Flag Line had become an obsession, swam from the little beach near Sydney Heads with the long, deliberate strokes of the swimmer who was absolutely at home in the water. Near by were some rocks, popular with goggle-fishers and underwater swimmers, and used by beginners in skin-diving. Today he wore goggles, with the breathing tube inches above the water, and flippers. If every policeman in Sydney had seen him then they would not have recognized him, he felt absolutely confident of that, confident enough to boast about what he was going to do He had to boast, had to talk on the telephone at the very least; bottling everything up inside him was impossible. He could still remember how shocked the policeman he had talked to had sounded. He felt absolutely secure.

The Water Police in the launch carrying out their part in the great search for the wanted man, did not give this skin-diver a second thought. After all, there were eight or nine others within sight.

Marcus Barring was making quite sure he knew the effect of the currents and of the swell just inside the Heads.

The first radio telegram from a Blue Flag Line ship reached Police HQ at a quarter past three that Saturday morning. It said: *Search completed, nothing found. Master, Nesia.* By the time Roger reached the office, at a quarter to eight, eleven 'all clear' messages were in, but none from the *Kookaburra.* A sergeant brought in two more. *The Reef*, in dock at Hong Kong was clear, so was *The Tasman*, now sailing between Bombay and Colombo.

At half past eight, Luke Shaw arrived.

'Don't look so smug, I've been down to the harbour and had a talk with the Water Branch,' he said. 'They've searched every small ship, every possible hiding-place along the shore line, and they've found no sign of Barring. The devil can't have disappeared into thin air' As he spoke the sergeant came in again. 'Anything from the *Kookaburra* yet?'

'No. *The Adela's* clear, in Saigon.'

'How many does that make?'

'Fourteen.'

'Over halfway. Any word from that psychiatrist, Handsome?'

'I saw him at ten o'clock last night,' Roger answered. 'Nothing doing yet.'

'Does *he* think she's got anything tucked away in her mind?'

'He thinks she might have.'

'Fat lot of help that is,' Shaw gloomed. 'Well, he's got the week-end to work in, and so have we. It's a good job we know the *Kookaburra*'s been warned, if we didn't I'd fly up to her myself.'

'Where is she?'

'About two hundred miles north of Brisbane,' Shaw answered 'She's due to berth on Tuesday, early afternoon. We can't do a thing except work over all we know, check with Hong Kong, and make sure we're all set to act on Monday morning.'

'We can cable the Yard to go over everything at Smith's office with a fine-toothed comb,' Roger said. 'And we can get them to check whether there's any sign of Communist influence at the Blue Flag Line office there. Fred Hodges will have more time to work on Wu Hong, too. Where shall we work from?'

'Better spend the week-end at my place,' Luke said. 'At least we'll have some comforts between telephone calls.'

Fifi Shaw could not have made Roger more welcome; they even found time, on the Sunday afternoon, to drive up to Palm Beach and look in at the surfing at all the beaches on the way. Word came from more and more ships that no explosives had been found after a thorough search.

They were in the office early on the Monday morning, edgy because the only word from the *Kookaburra* was that the search was proceeding. There were piles of papers on Luke Shaw's desk, almost as many on Roger's. Most were routine reports, details of the ships' searches. Roger made hardly any notes as he read on

Shaw looked up, a file under his hand. 'We've questioned twenty-nine of Barring's old buddies, and none of them have

seen him for five years or more.' He studied another report. 'The real Benjamin Limm confirms Solomon's story about the passport, the police up at Broome have interviewed him. Damned fool.' Shaw put those papers aside and picked up another file. Roger saw his body stiffen. 'Here's a queer one.'

Roger went across to him, heart leaping.

'Good or bad?'

'Remember Percival Sheldon?'

'He was in insurance in Adelaide, and murdered at London Airport,' Roger said.

'Good on you.' Shaw looked up, frowning, but a hint of excitement showed in his eyes. 'He was a friend of Mortimer Flag. How about that?' He squatted on the corner of his desk. 'I wonder if those baskets know more than we realize. How would you like a chance to put Mortimer through a nice fine screen, the fat son-and-so.'

'Don't you want it?' asked Roger. 'Where's that list of members of the Sydney Yacht Club?' As Shaw handed it to him he flipped over the pages to the *Fs*.

'I've got to see the Commissioner at nine-thirty, and I ought to be around until all the reports are in from the ships. Go and see Mortimer, Handsome. If there's any news, I'll call you.'

Roger said softly: 'I'll gladly go. Mortimer Flag is about Marcus Barring's age, which is thirty-nine. Percival Sheldon was thirty-eight. All three were members of the Yacht Club, as well as in the same age-group. Did they have anything else in common, I wonder.'

Mortimer Flag was in his own office, which was large, shiny, almost flashy. A big portrait of Raymond Flag, the silvery hair showing that it had been painted recently, hung on the wall behind the desk. There was a huge slab of plate glass over it. To call him fat would be unjust, but he would soon become fat if he went on as he was doing. His fair hair was slicked down, his pale face had the smoothness of a woman's – almost as if he did not need to shave.

'Yes, I knew Sheldon as a club member,' he said to Roger. 'Is there any reason why I shouldn't?' That was a poor attempt at sarcasm. 'I also knew Marcus Barring.'

'Was there any association except in the club?' asked Roger.

'We were known to play cards together.'

'You mean you gambled?'

'With modest stakes, yes. I really cannot see the relevance of these questions. All of this is old history. We haven't met for over ten years.'

'When you broke up the Barrings' business —'

'Let me make one thing crystal clear,' interrupted Mortimer. He acquired a kind of dignity which Roger had not seen in him before. 'We did *not* break up the Barring Line. It was an old-fashioned, badly managed company, seriously undercapitalized. In order to meet increasing competition, the Line borrowed too heavily and incurred a number of debts it could not pay. When we acquired it, we paid off all debts, gave old Barring generous compensation, and later even made room for the sons in this company, when they were in need. There is no guilty conscience among the directors of this company, Superintendent.'

Roger said mildly: 'That's good, sir. It's always easier to work with all the cards on the table. You were friendly with Marcus Barring before the take-over, then. Were you afterwards?'

'No. He took the take-over as a personal affront and behaved like a fool.'

'Whose side was Sheldon on?'

'As far as I know he took a completely rational view. He moved to Adelaide soon afterwards, and continued to do considerable business for the Line That is no secret. We met perhaps twice a year.'

'Did you ever notice any change in his attitude towards you?'

'None at all.'

'Why did he travel on the *Kookaburra*?'

'He had a serious operation for lung cancer last year, was advised to take a long sea trip, and was able to go on the Blue Flag Line at a nominal cost.' Mortimer Flag's little, feminine mouth was pressed so tightly that the lips seems to disappear. 'Where *is* all this leading to?'

'I want to know what other interests you, Sheldon, and Marcus Barring had in common, what friends you had, whether

there was any reason other than the take-over for Barring's deep-rooted enmity.'

'We had no other interests – except a love of swimming, surfing, and sailing. We were members of the same surf, swimming, and yachting clubs. If you get lists of the members of the clubs twelve years ago you will find all the information I can give you. Now you must excuse me, Superintendent. I have an important board meeting in twenty minutes' time.'

'I won't keep you long,' Roger said. 'One more question.'

'Very well.'

'Are you considering any offer for a take-over, Mr Flag?'

Flag snapped: 'No, we are not.'

'Hasn't it been on the agenda?'

'No!'

'Then what made you think that the whole purpose of the *Kookaburra* murders might be an attempt to weaken your standing? Your cousin Gregory was most concerned as to what would happen if the stories got around – too concerned, some might think. So were you. A company in good standing can weather a temporary recession, but a company which wants to preserve itself and its assets including goodwill could suffer from rumours very seriously. Why are you so nervous, Mr Flag?'

Mortimer Flag stood up, very slowly, moistened his lips, held his right lapel tighter, showing how plump and pale his hand was, and spoke with unexpected dignity.

'I am not nervous Nor are my fellow directors. We are jealous, extremely jealous, of our good name We do not believe there is anything for us to fear. We believe that if you, the police, did your job properly you would find that these murders are not associated with the Blue Flag Line. If you wish to see me in the future, Superintendent, I must ask you to make a formal appointment. Now I must ask you to —'

His telephone bell rang. He hesitated, then leaned forward, and picked up the instrument.

'I told you I wanted no interruptions. . . . I see. . . . Yes, in those circumstances you were quite right.' He held out the telephone. 'The call is for you.'

'Thanks.' Roger took the receiver, and in doing so touched

Mortimer Flag's hand; it was warm and moist. He gave that a passing thought as he said: 'West speaking.'

'Handsome, it looks as if we're coming unstuck,' Luke Shaw said in a voice which betrayed real anxiety. 'We've had all the radio reports in now, and every ship is clear – including the *Kookaburra*, which is due in on Monday, a day early.'

It was now Monday morning, time was running so very short.

## 20

# Jubilation to Despair

MORTIMER FLAG, STILL standing at the desk, stared intently at Roger. Roger had the impression that the director already knew the result of the searches, and was now looking for signs of defeat; was beginning to gloat. Roger swallowed his pride, and said:

'Every ship completely clear. Is that it?'

'That's it. Almost wish one would blow up,' Shaw said lugubriously. 'Thought I'd better let you know in case the Flags know already. You'll realize it won't be any use trying to ride rough-shod over them. Sorry I got you into this spot, Handsome.'

Roger laughed, honestly amused.

'If that's the worst that ever happens to me, I'll be lucky. I'll be seeing you' He replaced the receiver, and smiled at Mortimer Flag 'All your ships report clear,' he said.

Mortimer's eyes were glowing.

'That's wonderful!' So he hadn't known. 'I told you you were making a mares' nest.' He lifted a telephone, but before he spoke the door behind Roger opened and Raymond Flag appeared Roger, looking over his shoulder, saw the chairman's eyes glowing, and the look of triumph on his face. Just behind him Gregory Flag was grinning with delight.

'All absolutely clear,' Raymond crowed.

'God, what a relief!' exclaimed Gregory.

Roger moved so that his back wasn't to any of them. He had expected to find gloating; in fact, he found what seemed to be unfeigned relief, remarkable in men who had appeared so confident that there could not possibly have been trouble on any of the Blue Flag Line ships.

'Surprised, Superintendent?' asked Raymond. 'I suppose that's natural. We believed you were wrong, but when you were so insistent you really had us worried. This is a great relief.'

'Even if it disappoints Superintendent West,' Mortimer put in waspishly.

'If I've given you the impression that I wanted one of your ships to vanish with all hands, I did a bad job,' Roger said. 'This may remove your main anxiety, but it doesn't remove mine. I want to catch a killer. I need men with money who are behind the killer, and I need to know why the murders were committed, why Lancelot Smith warned me that any of your ships might go down, and —'

'I've told you, Smith was obsessed with delusions,' Raymond interrupted.

'Do you think that's why Marcus Barring telephoned Superintendent Shaw and told him that the *Kookaburra* would never tie up in Sydney Harbour again?' asked Roger

'I don't believe —' Gregory began, but his voice trailed off.

'*What?*' gasped Mortimer.

'When was this?' demanded Raymond Flag.

All their jubilation vanished; in an instant their mood changed completely, alarm if not consternation was in their manner. They had moved so that they were lined up on one side of Mortimer's desk and Roger was on the other, his back to the door.

'It was immediately after I made an issue of the searches,' Roger said. None of the others spoke, and into the tense silence he dropped a question he had been wanting to ask ever since he had known these men. 'There are rumours that Chinese interests in Pekin would like to acquire the Blue Flag Line, and are attempting to force you to sell just as you forced the Barrings to sell. Have you been under any such pressures?' When

none of them answered, he went on: 'The kind of sacrifices made by Lancelot Smith and Paul Barring square with fanatical political faith. Have you any reason to believe that Smith was a Communist?'

Gregory Flag said: 'My God!'

Mortimer moved across to an easy-chair in the window, and dropped down into it.

Raymond stood at the desk, very pale, very still. It seemed a long time before he spoke, a long time before he could make up his mind what to say When the words did come they were low-pitched and uttered in a voice empty of emotion.

'Yes,' he said.

Roger, touched by the tension, made himself speak harshly.

'Are you sure he was?'

'Yes.'

'Did you know he was involved in some conspiracy against the company?'

Raymond answered: 'We feared it.'

'Why?'

'We know he wanted us to sell a majority of our holdings to Chinese nominees. We refused When these crimes were perpetrated, we feared that an attempt was being made to force our hands.'

'When did this pressure begin?'

'Six months ago.'

'After the SS *Koala* sank?' asked Roger.

'Yes,' Raymond said. 'In fact that —'

'Raymond, there's no need for this,' Mortimer said. He jumped up from the chair looking pale, but as if he were ready to put up a fight. 'There is no need for any further admissions or statements. There have been enough We've done everything humanly possible to make sure nothing goes wrong. Let matters rest as they are.'

'You didn't do much about warning your ships' masters, although you must have feared danger to one or another of them,' Roger said harshly.

'We knew perfectly well that if you wanted the warnings sent out you would send them out, it was immaterial whether we liked it or not,' Mortimer said coldly. 'Your way it was a

police inquiry. Had it been sent out by us it would have implied our belief that there was some danger. No such admission was necessary. We are not fools, Mr West.'

'I wonder.'

'What the hell do you mean?' Gregory Flag roared

'You must be fools if you really doubt whether I know that severe pressures made you keep silent, refusing to admit there was any danger. Obviously the pressure first made itself felt six months ago, nearly eighteen months after the loss of the *Koala*. They must have been very severe to affect you so badly. I'd say you were blackmailed.'

'I won't listen to this nonsense!' cried Mortimer. He jumped up and came forward, podgy hands clenched. 'You have no right to slander —'

'Oh, shut up,' Roger said angrily 'I can say what I like to the three of you, there's no question of slander. If it ever came to a court of law you'd be three to one against me, so I couldn't bring it to court. The *Koala*'s sinking was an insurance fraud, wasn't it?'

'Don't say a word!' cried Mortimer. 'Deny it.'

Neither of the others spoke, but Raymond slowly turned away. After a moment, he asked:

'Who else suspects this?'

'Never mind that,' Roger rasped. 'The *Kookaburra* is under threat. She's been reported all clear and yet she's still under threat. You know it You expected something to be found aboard, that was why you were so elated when you had the all clear. Was the *Kookaburra* your second insurance swindle? Was she to go down with all passengers and all hands to make some more filthy money for you?' When no one responded he raised his voice and shouted: 'Is that the truth? Answer, damn you, answer me!'

'Don't – don't say a word,' Mortimer almost choked.

After another long pause, Raymond Flag turned round, faced Roger squarely, and said:

'There is nothing we can do to stop it, West. We don't know what Marcus Barring plans, we have no idea how he meant to carry his plans out. There is nothing at all we can do.'

'We didn't know what he planned!' Mortimer said gaspingly. 'Greg – make Ray stop. He mustn't say another word. Make him stop.'

The Flag brothers now stared at each other, as if in fear.

Roger said savagely: 'I don't know what you've got on your conscience But if another man dies, if another man is injured, my God you'll pay for it.'

'I tell you we don't know where to find Barring!' That was Raymond.

'Was he to blow up the *Kookaburra* for you?'

'Don't say a word!' screeched Mortimer.

'You must know what he planned. How was he going to do it?' Anger, half simulated, half real, made Roger's voice hoarse. Recollection of the positive relief these men had shown when told nothing had been found on any ship made one thing obvious. They had expected a time bomb or some such device inside the ship before it reached Sydney, but did not not necessarily know anything more. If he could frighten them enough they might yet tell him what Marcus Barring planned.

A telephone bell rang, a jarring, unwanted sound from outside. Gregory Flag moved and plucked up the instrument, snatching at any release from tension. Mortimer moved towards his elder cousin, hands stretched out as if in supplication. There would be no doubt of the awful guilt of these three men, but that hardly seemed important; retribution could come later, rescue from that unknown danger was desperately needed first.

'Yes?' Gregory Flag's voice rose high. 'Who? . . Yes, hold on ' He lowered the receiver and handed it towards Roger. 'It's Shaw, for you.'

Roger took the telephone, and said as mildly as he could: 'Yes, Luke?'

'We've had a break,' Shaw said with suppressed excitement. 'That psychiatrist made something click in Doreen Morrison's memory. She remembers a quarrel between Perce Sheldon, the Adelaide insurance man and Paul Barring. She doesn't know what it was about, but she remembers some of the words. Your psychiatrist thinks some are probably key words. Ready for 'em?'

'Yes,' Roger said.

'Sheldon shouted the words: *"Yes, all of them, damn you, all of them. You'll never get away with it."*'

Roger had a pencil out and wrote swiftly in a kind of private shorthand.

'Next?'

'Paul Barring responded calmly: *"Nothing you or anyone else can do will stop us. You'd better not try."*'

'Go on,' Roger said tensely. He was aware of the others drawing nearer, as if in an effort to see what he was writing.

'Sheldon replied, wildly: *"You can't scare me. Too many people know. Don't open your bloody mouth, understand?"*'

'Yes,' Roger said.

'That's it.' Shaw seemed almost reluctant to finish 'Someone else came along – the Captain or first mate, Doreen thinks, and the shouting stopped. Next time Sheldon and Paul Barring met they were drinking together, and seemed on friendly terms. Doreen says she forgot everything about this until the psychiatrist questioned her about conversations she had heard between other people. Then it came back to her. See the significance, don't you? Sheldon's "all of them" could have meant the people who afterwards died. Paul Barring's "You'd better not try to stop us," could be the threat to kill. Sheldon or any of the poeple he was supposed to have informed could have become a danger to the Barrings.'

'But did Sheldon tell the girl anything?' Roger asked.

He looked up as he spoke, into the faces of the three men. Mortimer's face blanched, he opened his lips and gasped; and he seemed to form the name 'Sheldon'.

'She can't remember anything. Of course Sheldon may have been lying,' went on Shaw. 'He may have told Paul Barring that those other people knew, simply to scare Barring. If he did, and if Barring had to go ahead with whatever he planned – the sinking of the *Kookaburra*, say – he may have killed them all to make sure none of them could stop him.'

'So all the murders would be directly concerned with the plot against the *Kookaburra*,' Roger said 'Right, Luke, thanks. We need a full transcription of everything Sheldon said, of course.'

'What's that?' asked Shaw, puzzled.

'I'll be in touch,' Roger said.

He rang off, still watching the three directors closely. They looked sick with fear, but Raymond had a better grip on himself than the others. Mortimer had given up trying to stop him from speaking.

'So Sheldon was in the insurance swindle over the *Koala*, and knew about the plot on the *Kookaburra*,' Roger said coldly. 'Paul and Marcus Barring decided to kill everyone he said he had told.'

'We knew nothing about such a decision,' Raymond Flag asserted. 'We had reason to suspect that in his obsessive hatred for this company, Marcus Barring would try to blow up a second ship. Insurance was not involved. In spite of the Court of Inquiry findings we suspected sabotage on the *Koala*, as did the police. None could be proved. We had reason to fear further sabotage for the same reason on the *Kookaburra*, but we could do no more than we did – you were in fact ahead of us. We are not criminals. If we knew how to stop this wickedness we would have told you long ago. We believed that some time-bomb would be planted on the ship, as you did. If that isn't the case —'

He broke off.

Roger caught his breath, and turned to the telephone, snatched it up and barked: 'Get me Superintendent Shaw, of Police Headquarters.' He held the receiver to his ear. 'If it isn't an inside job it's an outside one. Marcus Barring's an expert goggle-fisher and underwater swimmer. One limpet mine on the hull of the *Kookaburra* would be enough to sink her. What time is she due?'

'She's picking up the pilot outside the Heads about now,' Raymond said.

# 21

# Limpet

'LUKE,' ROGER SAID, 'one limpet mine on the hull of the *Kookaburra* would sink it.'

'And do God knows what damage to the nearest houses,' Shaw said tautly 'We've got all the Water Police launches and a dozen naval frogmen almost ready to go You nagged about Marcus Barring's past so much, I really got down to checking it. He was an expert skin-diver and trained as an amateur frogman. I'm going to pick up a launch at Circular Quay right now. Coming?'

'If you don't wait for me it will be the last time I'll come to Sydney.'

'I'll leave a smaller launch, you can catch up,' Luke said.

Roger put down the receiver, very slowly. Everything in him screamed 'hurry', but Shaw and the others could handle the crisis in the harbour better than he. His first job was with the Flags. Raymond had regained his poise and was fighting back. Mortimer was looking better, as if he had been drawn safely from the brink of a precipice. Gregory stood, block-like, by the window looking out over the harbour.

'So you think that's how he will do it,' Raymond said levelly. 'I know the police will do everything humanly possible to save the ship. There is nothing at all we can do.'

'No,' Roger agreed in a cold, hard voice. 'Nothing you can do – except hire the best lawyers in Australia to try to get you cleared of a charge of multiple murder.'

'We have committed no crime,' Raymond said.

'You haven't enough evidence even to make a charge, and if a rumour of what you've been saying leaks into the newspapers, we'll sue you for a million pounds for defamation – you *or* Scotland Yard.'

'You won't need to,' Roger said. 'You keep busy working on your defence.'

He saw Gregory's hands clenching by his side. Gregory looked the strongest but might prove to be the weakest of them all. It would be useless to try to work on him now, for under the protection of his brother and his cousin he would hold out. Expecting him to crack was probably a forlorn hope, anyhow.

Roger turned towards the door. None of the others came back at him, that last thrust had worried them He went out, his heart like a leaden weight with a sense of utter failure. Failure was always bitter He hadn't even been the first to jump to the limpet mine possibility It had been so obvious once he had thought of it, but if no action had been taken before it had sprung to his mind, what chance would there be to save the *Kookaburra*?

What chance was there now?

Roger began to think of that, and preoccupation with his own failures faded. He kept his finger on the bell-push for the lift, but one was a long time coming. He glanced out of a narrow window on the landing, and suddenly realized he could see the Heads. He strode to the window and looked over the sunlit city towards the Bridge and the harbour. There could be no better view, but he wasn't interested in the scene, only in the ship which was through the great cliffs of the entrance and well into the harbour.

Small craft were approaching it.

A girl called: 'Going down.'

Roger turned and half ran to the lift.

Jack and Jill Parrish and all the other passengers of the *Kookaburra* stood on deck, watching the passing scene: the bays and inlets, the small craft at anchor, the cliffs, and the rocks. The sun was warm but not hot; it was quite, quite beautiful.

They put down the hustle and bustle about them to preparations for berthing, although they knew they had to go under the Bridge for the ship would tie up in the inner harbour.

Then quite unbelievably, the signal to abandon ship broke

through the idyllic minutes Six short, one long blast on the ship's whistle, which did not seem to stop. They saw many of the boats heading towards them, and Parrish recognized a naval launch equipped for deep-sea diving.

'It can't be serious,' Jill said, half-scared.

'It's serious, all right,' Jack said. 'Come on.'

As in a dream turned nightmare they hurried down to their cabin for lifebelts. Other passengers appeared, puzzled, some frightened looking. A young officer said:

'No need to be alarmed. There's plenty of room for all, and we haven't far to go.'

Some Chinese were running purposefully.

Someone laughed, on a note of hysteria.

Someone called out in a clear, high-pitched voice:

'What about the *sharks*?'

The alarm signal, the young officer, the word 'sharks', and thought of all her trousseau – practically everything she possessed – being lost, all merged together in Jill Parrish's mind as she hurried along, her husband's fingers tight about her forearm. The sounds so often heard at sea, of the lifeboats being lowered from the davits, became suddenly sinister.

'Hurry!' she gasped. 'We've got to hurry!'

She was gasping for breath as panic began to work in her.

'I shall stay with the ship,' the Master said into the loudspeaker. 'All passengers and members of the crew will abandon ship. All officers may do so when their duties are completed.'

The sun was so warm. The harbour so beautiful. The Bridge so unbelievably huge, as if indestructible. Cars were flashing across it, and in the distance he could hear the rumble of a train.

Marcus Barring reached the *Kookaburra* ten minutes before the alarm was given. He was no longer excited, but simply carrying out a job which had to be done. He placed the magnetized limpet mine on the hull of the ship, halfway between the keel and the Plimsoll line almost level with the engine-room – the most vulnerable place of all. He pulled at it, but it was so tight that he could not shift it. He swam away under water, until he was clear of the ship's wake, and surfaced. He

then turned over on to his back, discarding his miniature oxygen cylinder, which would arouse suspicion if it was noticed. He had at least twenty minutes' grace, and had no idea that the harbour was now alive with men and boats searching for him. There was a slight risk of sharks, but he had a knife in his belt and sharks did not worry him. He was in no danger from the explosion, which should come just as the ship passed under Sydney Bridge.

Every frogman assigned to the emergency knew exactly what he had to do, and just how desperate the situation was. It would be almost impossible to prise off a limpet mine from the hull of the *Kookaburra*. It would have to be dismantled, a difficult and awkward task under water, and all the time they would work in the knowledge that if it exploded it would blow them to pieces.

First, *find* the bloody thing.

Six men on each side, they swam alongside the ship, those near the stern secured by lifeline against the pull of the propeller. They had to search the whole expanse of the red-painted hull and could not even be sure that a mine would be planted on the spot where a professional would place it Fish swam close. Twice the long, grey shape of a shark passed nearby as they worked.

Leading-Frogman Kenneth Hallam was the first to see the round plate-like shape of the mine stuck to the side. He swam closer, made sure, and then released two smoke pellets which would rise to the surface and explode into white smoke when in contact with the air. Soon, others would come to his aid, but he had to start this job alone. He tried to prise it away, but as he had expected, it was stuck too tightly. The only hope was to dismantle it. Quite calmly, he began to prepare his tools.

Roger saw Luke Shaw in a larger launch only fifty yards away. His launch drew alongside, and he jumped from one to the other. For a moment he was dazzled by the sun, but he shaded his eyes and looked about him. Not far away was the Bridge, and the *Kookaburra* was swinging round perhaps fifty yards away from it. Next he saw the lifeboats being lowered into

the water. The operation seemed to be taking place a long, long way from here. Reality was touched with unreality.

He joined Shaw in the thwarts.

Five minutes afterwards, two little clouds of smoke billowed up from the sea to the surface of the water.

'*See that?*' Shaw gasped. 'They've found a mine.'

'Luke,' Roger said, 'there's no point in any craft being too near unless it can be useful. Why don't you move your chaps back?'

'You going back?' demanded Shaw, almost truculently.

'No, but —'

'Be yourself,' Shaw said brusquely.

They watched as the lifeboats pulled away, the ship slowed down almost to a standstill, dangerously close to the Bridge, the naval craft keeping close to the painted sides.

Ashore, police and naval and military units were moving bathers and surfers off the more exposed beaches. Blast could start a wave which could engulf the bays and carry death and destruction with it Above, the Bridge was being closed to the annoyance of thousands of motorists. One piece of debris flung high by an explosion could carry disaster to any traffic on the broad highway.

Marcus Barring, still on his back, saw that the *Kookaburra* had virtually stopped, and was riding at anchor. He turned on his stomach and swam towards the nearest rocks, clambered on to them and stared across, appalled by the sight of so many craft, the lifeboats, the evidence that the alarm had been given.

'They got cold feet,' he cried aloud. 'The swine went chicken. I'll give them chicken.'

Involuntarily, he touched the knife in his belt. Then he squatted and stared until gradually light began to glow in his eyes again. The *Kookaburra* was moving slowly away from the Bridge; very, very slowly.

'They'll never save her,' he breathed. 'They'll never save her. They haven't ten minutes left.'

Two men had their heads close together, bodies diagonally

away from each other, kicking to hold their position in the quiet water. Their fingers sometimes touched as one handed a tool to the other. The mine looked so innocent, just a big, thick, round plate on the side of the ship. One man drilled with professional care, knowing that if this mine had a booby trap there was no way to stop it from blowing them to pieces. The signal had gone out to all naval and police craft to move to points of safety Luke Shaw was complaining bitterly about it; Roger only half heard him, he was so intent on the danger spot.

The two frogmen, one of them Hallam, could not, dared not hurry.

Once again the dark shape of a shark appeared, hovered, and moved sluggishly on.

A hush fell over the waiting, watching multitude on the ships, on the rocks, on the shore. The *Kookaburra* rode the calm waters with proud dignity In the hearts of most men there was a prayer for success, in Marcus Barring's a fierce longing for the moment when the roar would come and smoke and water would hide the ship, then clear away and reveal her sinking.

The Master, with all his officers, was on the bridge The engineering officers and three ratings were in the engine room, taking the ship slowly away from the Bridge.

'I've never known anything worse,' Luke muttered to Roger. 'If we could only see what they're doing. From here it looks as if they aren't doing a bloody thing. I'd give a fortune to be on the job myself.'

'I know what you mean,' Roger said. 'It would help if we knew how —'

A diver broke the surface of the water by the ship's side; a moment later another bobbed up. Luke put the glasses to his eyes, standing very still.

'Frogmen,' he said, as if that wasn't obvious to the naked eye. 'One of them's holding something in the air. He —'

There was a sudden outburst of cheering from the crew of the naval craft, and as it grew louder, the two frogmen began to swim towards it without any sense of urgency.

'Handsome,' choked Luke Shaw. 'They've made it.'

He lowered the glasses, and then slowly and deliberately put

out his right hand. As Roger gripped it, feeling almost weak with relief, Luke went on: 'Now all we've got to do is find Barring and pin the job on to the Flags.'

## 22

# Hate Killer

A MAN GAVE Roger a hand up as they reached Circular Quay Sydney Cove was jammed tight with people, on the Manley Ferry terminal, on the Mosman Ferry terminal, by the ocean terminal, everywhere with a view of the quay. Two lifeboats from the *Kookaburra* were already near the landing-stage, someone raised a cheer.

A big man came up to Luke Shaw.

'Just had a message,' he announced.

'Can't it wait?'

'Marcus Barring's been seen.'

Roger caught his breath.

'Where?' demanded Shaw softly.

'He was seen near the Yacht Club on the other side of the Bridge. He'd some goggles on at first, but took them off to put on his clothes. Before any of our chaps could reach him he'd disappeared.'

'Any idea which way he was heading?'

'There's a report he was seen at Milson's Point Station, on the platform for the City Trains.'

Luke hesitated only for a moment. As he began to move, Roger said:

'Let's go.' They piled into a waiting police car, and Luke ordered the driver:

'Ocean House, and make it a record.'

'Okay.'

'Handsome,' Luke said, smacking his right hand on Roger's knee, 'we saved that ship and all that's in it. My word, we

did! I still can't believe the danger's over. Did you picture the same things as I did while we were waiting?'

'One big explosion,' Roger said.

'The biggest! But it just didn't happen.' Shaw proffered cigarettes. They lit up, and Shaw leaned back in his seat, still beaming. They could not make good speed because the traffic was so thick, and most of it seemed to be heading for the Cove. 'Think any of the Flags will talk?' he asked.

'Gregory might.'

'I know one way of making 'em,' Luke said.

'What's that?'

'Let Marcus Barring get at them. They'd squeal all right.'

'That's what we are doing, isn't it?'

'*What?*'

'You haven't warned your chaps to watch Ocean House yet.'

'My word, I forgot it,' Luke stretched over the empty seat in front of him and snatched the radio-phone from its hook. As soon as he heard a response, he boomed: 'Charley, Marcus Barring's probably heading for Ocean House. If he gets there let him go up. Handsome West and I will be there in five minutes.' He rang off, sat back, and beamed only a little less expansively. 'You ever thought of retiring and becoming a private eye, Handsome?'

'Not yet. Why?'

'If you change your mind, let me know. We'll go into partnership.' Shaw squashed out his cigarette on the floor, shot Roger a sideways glance, and went on: 'I've got to admit there are advantages in having an organization behind you, though.'

'Such as?' asked Roger. He spoke almost lazily, feeling a curious reaction of fatigue although he had not exerted himself physically. It was hard to realize the real weight of anxiety had gone, the nightmare of losing a ship with all hands had been banished. He hardly heard the beginning of Shaw's reply.

'You can get other people to do the chores for you, telephone London and other places.'

'Telephone Lond —' Roger sat up. 'Did you? Today?'

'Yes. To find out if there's any evidence Smith was a Communist. We got some very interesting information from your man Kebble, who was going to ring us, anyway. Smith wasn't

a member of any Party, but he kept notes – doodling kind of notes. Kebble found an old notepad tucked away in a drawer. Some notes said: "*Expect call from Mr Raymond, ten o'clock.*" Then there were doodles, the kind of thing you'd scribble while taking instructions for a boss. One note was: "*Imply attempt at take-over by Red C.?*"'

Roger had never been wider awake.

'See what that might mean,' Luke said.

'I see. The Red take-over rumour started from Ocean House.'

'That's what your man Kebble suggested. Bright boy, Kebble. If he ever wants to come to a land full of sunshine, I'll find him a job in the cop shop. Another note ran: "*£1000 for the B-Bs.*"'

'B Bs – Barring Brothers!' Roger exclaimed.

'Who else? And Smith took a thousand quid in cash out of the bank that day.'

'We've nearly got them,' Roger said.

'You're right we have.'

They were within sight of Ocean House, now, at the corner of Hunter Street and Spring.

'What else did you forget to tell me?' Roger demanded.

'I talked to Fred Hodges this morning, too. He's wormed a bit out of that Chinaman who nearly killed Doreen Morrison. The Chink was told to say he was a Commie and had orders from over the border, near Canton. Marcus Barring told him to say it. He didn't obey because he thought if he was a Red he'd be deported. He'd rather live in a Hong Kong jail. So the Barrings *and* the Flags spread the Red take-over story.'

'Well, well,' said Roger. 'A very nice cover, and a very neat get out if any suspicions were aroused. The Flags employed the Barrings.' He finished as the car drew up outside the sky-scraper. A man sprang forward and opened the door.

'Barring arrived?'

'He was seen at the corner of Spring and Hunter a few minutes ago, sir.'

'Let him come up,' Shaw ordered.

'Right!'

A lift was waiting, almost as if it had been laid on for them. They stopped twice on the way to the top floor. The outer

door of the Flag offices was ajar. Roger led the way. Raymond's secretary gave a startled smile, but before she spoke Shaw held out his card.

'Do you know Marcus Barring?'

'I have seen him, sir, yes.'

'If he comes in let him go straight through to Mr Raymond's office,' Luke said.

'But Mr Raymond said he wasn't to be disturbed.'

'He wasn't expecting the police,' Shaw retorted. As he went on, with Roger a step behind, he added in an aside: 'She'll warn them, but it doesn't matter.'

He opened the door of the Chairman's office as a telephone bell rang inside. Raymond Flag was at his desk, hand already on the telephone. Gregory was on the right, Mortimer on the left. They stared up at Roger, as if worked by strings. Raymond hesitated, and the bell kept on ringing.

'That's just to announce us,' Luke Shaw said.

Mortimer sprang up. 'You have no right to intrude like this'

'Yes, I know they are.' Raymond put down the receiver slowly, and settled back in his chair. His poise was quite remarkable as he spoke.

'We are all tremendously relieved that the SS *Kookaburra* was not destroyed, or even damaged,' he said. 'We are glad to be able to congratulate you.'

Gregory asked heavily: 'Have you caught Barring?'

'We know where he is,' Shaw stated flatly.

'Do you think he'll commit suicide like his brother did in London?' asked Roger.

'Or do you just hope?' mocked Luke.

'Unless you leave this office at once, I shall telephone the Commissioner of Police and lodge a complaint that you have continually exceeded your duty and have been rude to the point of insolence,' Mortimer threatened. There was a pink tinge on his pale cheeks. 'Go at once.'

Neither Roger nor Luke Shaw moved. After a moment of tension, Mortimer stretched out his hand towards the telephone. Almost at once there were heavy footsteps outside, a woman's voice was raised – and the telephone rang, startling Mortimer so much that he snatched his hand away. Roger and

Shaw moved back towards the wall which was flush with the door Raymond reached out for the telephone, but before he could lift it the door burst open and Marcus Barring appeared. He strode in and slammed the door. Almost with the same movement he pulled his knife from the waistband of his jeans.

'So you told the police, you couldn't go through with it,' he said raspingly. 'I'm going to do what I ought to have done years ago – slit your throats instead of taking your filthy money.'

He took another long stride forward. The three men in front of him seemed so petrified that they hardly remembered the two policemen.

Barring said to Mortimer: 'You first, you fat slug, you started it. You —'

'What did he start?' inquired Luke Shaw, mildly.

Barring spun round towards him, knife in hand, already thrusting. Roger went forward smoothly and with hardly a sound, stretched out and grasped Barring's free hand, twisting so sharply that Barring gasped in pain. The fingers holding the knife grew slack. Shaw moved with almost casual speed, wrested the knife away, and tossed it on to the big desk As it clattered, Roger pulled Barring round to face the directors, forcing the man's arm up behind him in a hammerlock.

'When you're talking to the Commissioner, Mr Flag, tell him we also saved you from having your throats cut,' Shaw said 'Then he'll really have it in for us.'

'Barring,' Roger said quietly, 'did these men pay you to blow up the *Kookaburra*?'

'You bet they did!'

'Did they pay you and your brother to blow up the *Koala*?'

'Yes, the swine, they did.'

'Did they order you to kill Sheldon and the others in London? And Sanderson in Hong Kong?'

'No one orders *me* about,' Barring said roughly. 'Sheldon knew about the *Koala*, he was in on that deal. He knew about the *Kookaburra*, too. He got cold feet and tried to stop us, and —'

'You crazy liar!' Mortimer screamed at him. 'I deny it, we all deny every word. He hates our guts, he'd do anything to destroy us.'

'He's going to destroy you from the witness-box,' Luke Shaw said with supreme confidence. Roger had never heard him speak so bitingly. 'I am going to charge each one of you with conspiracy to destroy a ship while at sea. That will do for a start. Handsome, I expect some of my chaps followed Barring up. Let 'em in, will you?'

When Roger let Barring go, the man made no attempt to escape or to attack the Flags, just stood glaring at them as if gloating over their downfall.

Roger left the police headquarters with Solomon Barring, alias Ben Limm, about two hours later, and got into a police car. The driver knew where to go, and Solomon knew that he would soon be with Doreen. Now he relaxed in a corner as Roger spoke.

'Your brother made a full confession, and I doubt if he left much out. Both your brothers were thorns in the Flag flesh for years, and Mortimer tried to buy them off. Two years ago the Line was having a bad time. There were two successive years of lower-than-average wool clip, and a recession which cut imports sharply. The idea of sinking the *Koala* for insurance – she was an old ship, over-insured – was attractive. It was to have been done near land, without any lives lost Marcus says something went wrong with a timing mechanism of the limpet mine, and the explosion was premature.'

'I pray to God that's true,' Solomon Barring said huskily. 'But the way they killed Denise and Sheldon – what made them? What got into them?' He was in anguish because of his brothers' crimes.

'Marcus says that Sheldon, who was party to the first sinking, threatened to tell the whole story to the police if they tried anything with the *Kookaburra* Mortimer had asked him to give extra insurance cover, he'd guessed why, and set out to to stop it. He hoped he could prevent the whole business without paying for his part in the *Koala* disaster. We know what happened.' He paused. 'There was digitalis on board, and Paul knew how to use a hypodermic syringe We know what followed Sheldon told your brothers that the two Morrison girls and the First Engineer, Neil Sanderson, knew about the plot. In London

your brothers tried desperately to find out whether they did know, for neither man wanted to kill the sisters. Marcus and Denise had had an *affaire* on the outward voyage, and Denise didn't mind continuing it on land. The "Mr and Mrs Brown" was false, of course, but there isn't much doubt that Denise expected Marcus to marry her. Then his probing questions made her suspicious, and there was a quarrel. Something she said made Marcus think Sheldon had told her, and so Marcus killed her Marcus hated the thought of killing Doreen but there was so much at stake. The Flags had promised them a ship of their own for a nominal sum.'

'So it was for money,' Solomon said heavily.

'Yes. The Flags bought the hatred out of your brothers,' Roger said, 'but evil remained in them. Sheldon found out where they lived, and they frightened him into heading for home He swore he wouldn't talk to the police, but they didn't think he would keep silent when he realized that Denise had been murdered. So Paul watched London Airport, but wasn't sure he used the digitalis in time – Sheldon went to a telephone booth unexpectedly We know what happened afterwards.'

'My own – brothers,' Solomon said painfully.

'There was one good thing,' Roger said. 'Their fierce family loyalty remained, and they would not injure you According to Marcus, Paul killed himself rather than be questioned and made to talk – he knew he would talk, he wasn't one to hold out. I doubt if we'll ever know for certain why Lancelot Smith killed himself He was in the know about the *Koala* sinking, and it obviously tormented him.'

'I think I can guess what happened,' Solomon said 'I knew him well at one time He had a deep sense of loyalty and would loathe any betrayal of trust. The crimes would prey on his mind, but he could not betray the Flags. He would never forget that in spite of his appearance they gave him that job in London.' After a pause he went on: 'Is there anything else?'

They were in the thick of the traffic at the end of Elizabeth Street now; thick, noisy traffic of which they were oblivious.

'The first indication of trouble was when your brother Paul received a note saying that someone on board the *Kookaburra*

knew his part in the *Koala* sinking,' Roger said. 'He started to go through all the cabins, looking at handwriting, and he took an elderly passenger's wallet, to search it. This was found in his cabin and he was dismissed for suspected theft. Marcus walked off with him. Strange man, your brother Marcus When he switched allegiance to the Flags he was absolutely loyal until he thought they had failed him. As recently as last week he called them murdering swine and swore they wouldn't have a ship left, simply to try to draw my suspicions off them.'

There was a film of tears in Solomon's eyes.

A minute later the car drew up outside the hotel. Roger saw Doreen Morrison on the steps of the hotel As Solomon got out she came running, eyes glowing, arms outstretched, quite oblivious of the passing crowds.

'Drive me to the Wentworth,' Roger said to the driver.

At least Solomon and Doreen would not take long to forget.

He was at the hotel foyer later that evening, when there was a telephone call for Mr Jack Parrish He saw a tall, handsome man get up from a table where he had been sitting with an attractive blonde ten or fifteen years younger. The way Jill Parrish watched her husband told Roger that their honeymoon was a long way from over.

He went up to his room later, and found a cable and a letter; the letter from Janet. He opened the cable first and read:

> Congratulations from everyone including the Commander stop Sam Hackett married in Tours.
>
> Kebble.

Roger chuckled.

He opened Janet's letter, heart beating a little faster than normal, which was a remarkable thing for a man who had been married for nearly twenty-five years. The first sentence ran:

> 'Darling, I'm sorry about interrupting you at the airport, I haven't forgiven myself yet . . .'

He had barked at her – and *she* was apologizing. She remembered the incident so vividly but until this moment he had forgotten it. At least he need never tell her so.

'. . . and you'll be an utter fool if you don't take at least a week of the leave the Yard owes you, to look at Australia. I'd hate you to miss that – much though I miss you.

The boys say they'll write tomorrow. . . .'

Roger read the letter again, stepped to the window, saw traffic heading for the Bridge, the couples in the little park, the neon signs flashing; and in the distance, a glow of light in the harbour where the SS *Kookaburra* was tied up safe and sound.

Book Three

# MURDER, LONDON-SOUTH AFRICA

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# I

# *MISSING MAN*

'HANDSOME IN?'

'No.'

'Anyone seen Handsome?'

'Not since lunch.'

'Handsome, Handsome! Anyone seen Handsome?'

'If I had a nickname like Handsome I'd want to hang myself,' said a middle-aged detective-sergeant at New Scotland Yard. 'It's bad enough looking like a film-star, let alone being called like one. Handsome, Handsome, anyone seen Handsome?' he mimicked.

'Is someone asking for me?' inquired Chief Superintendent Roger 'Handsome' West of the Criminal Investigation Department. He was irritated, but he knew the sergeant for a somewhat disappointed and consequently jaundiced man, and bore him no ill-will, so he did not reveal the fact that he had heard everything the other had said as he approached a corner of a passage in the offices on the Embankment. He looked inquiringly into Sergeant Gorlay's startled grey eyes.

Gorlay was quick of thought as well as movement, a lean ferret of a man. He drew himself up to an attitude almost of attention, so as to emphasize respect.

'Good afternoon, sir. Yes. There has been a call for you. I believe that you're wanted in the Assistant Commissioner's office.'

'Mustn't keep him waiting, must we,' said Roger, and he lengthened his stride towards his own office. As the door opened, the sound of his telephone bell came clearly along the passage, and the door closed on his 'hallo'. The man with Gorlay, another detective sergeant, grinned and said:

'Handsome is as Handsome does. He couldn't have failed to hear you.'

'Could have,' Gorlay conceded.

In his office, Roger sat on the corner of his desk, glancing at four reports which had been put there since he had left only half an hour ago. A shaft of October sunlight, reflected from the River Thames, shimmered on a section of the dark, shiny desk. The office was at its brightest, for there had been hardly a cloud over London's sky all day.

'You're through,' the operator said.

'West here,' said Roger. 'Is that right you've been after me?'

'If you'd been away much longer I would have wanted to know where you'd been,' retorted the Assistant Commissioner gruffly. 'Come along right away, will you?'

He rang off before Roger could say another word. Roger stood up from the desk, but did not go immediately to the door. He moved to the window and looked past the bright green of the leaves of the plane trees on the Embankment, and the traffic, towards the broad river beyond, and the mass of London County Hall on the farther side. He was not thinking about the river scene, nor even of the sun. He was telling himself that first Gorlay and now Hardy had made him feel angry, and that was a bad sign. He had covered his irritation with the sergeant just as he must with the Assistant Commissioner, but he needed a minute or two's respite and he would need more than minutes to analyse his feelings.

Was there any justification for feeling mad? Wouldn't he have laughed off both things only a few weeks ago?

He turned away from the day's brightness and went out. He moved as he always did, with a kind of restrained briskness, as if he knew exactly where he wanted to go but something prevented him going too fast. The Assistant Commissioner's office was upstairs; it wasn't worth taking the lift. By the time he had climbed the stairs he was actually hurrying. Doubtless Hardy had been annoyed by something, too. Probably, he would be back to normal when Roger arrived. On the other hand, for a senior officer at the Yard to be told that he might have to explain where he had been for half an hour—

Roger began to smile. He had been out to lunch. With his wife. On a working weekday. That was little more than an annual event. He reached Hardy's office, and was about to tap when caution made him go on to the secretary's room, next door. Hardy was a man of moods and there was no point in exacerbating the situation. He went inside, and a middle-aged woman, who was bending over a typewriter, glanced up. It was obvious at once that she was out of temper, too; she usually had a smile which brightened her homely but pleasant face. Now she said:

'The Assistant Commissioner would like you to go straight in.'

'Thanks.' Often Roger would have asked her what was up, but today he decided that it would not be wise. So he tapped at the communicating door, and as he did so the keys of the typewriter began to clatter, as if snapping out a coded message of defiance.

Hardy was at his big, dark, shiny pedestal-type desk, with its In, Out, Pending, and other trays. The office was not large, but there was room for more chairs, more furniture, more filing cabinets. The bareness gave it a look of austerity, and in a way there was a look of austerity about Hardy, too. He was an aloof man, one who had come up from the ranks and had been given this eminence because no one better was available at the time. Sometimes he gave the impression that he was as soured as Gorlay, but Roger was never sure this was so. Hardy was probably a lonely man, not quite big enough for his job. He was not heavily-built, as old-time Yard men went, but rather spare boned, dressed in neutral grey, giving the impression that he was a little too well brushed. He had a rather broad face and deep set eyes. All his features were good in themselves, but the assemblage wasn't particularly striking, rather as though everything had been done by an indifferent artist.

'So you made it.' Hardy was frowning.

'Sorry I'm late,' Roger said. 'I'd no idea you wanted to see me this afternoon.'

'Couldn't very well. I didn't know myself'

Suddenly the frown disappeared, Hardy squared his

shoulders and drew in a deep breath, as if mentally he was pushing something aside. Bad humour?

'I've had urgent instructions from the Commissioner. There's some kind of trouble over at South Africa House, and he wants you to go and find out what it's all about.' It would have been easy for Hardy to say that this was because he, Roger, had been assigned to a number of cases with overseas angles, and had proved to have a flair for getting on with people and policemen whose outlook was very different from most in Great Britain. Hardy did not take the opportunity, implying rather that he was sending Roger to South Africa House because he had been told to, not because he thought he was the right man for the job. He added: 'Go over there at once, will you? The man you want to see is a Mr du Toit, the Consul-General if I understood him properly.'

'Do you know what it's all about?' asked Roger.

'Someone left South Africa for London and didn't get here. There's a pall of secrecy for some reason – and I don't know whether the Commissioner knows more than I do and didn't choose to tell me, or whether he's as much in the dark as I am. You're to go because of your well-known discretion,' Hardy added, and there was no doubt at all of the sarcasm in his voice.

Roger contemplated him, biting back a comment, and then turned towards the door, saying:

'Sometimes that gets stretched a bit too far.'

Hardy asked sharply:

'What does?'

'My discretion. Incidentally –' Roger reached the door leading to the secretary's office, half opened it, and said clearly: 'I took my wife out to lunch today.' He paused long enough to give Hardy a chance to disapprove, but the senior man didn't take it. Roger went out, and the door closed. At least Hardy's secretary had thawed a little, and she stopped typing.

'You wouldn't know what I've done wrong, would you?' Roger asked.

'I don't even know what *I've* done wrong!'

Roger smiled . . . and was chuckling by the time he reached his own office. He had counted four fresh files on his desk twenty minutes ago; now there were eight. He picked up his briefcase, pushed all the files in, and went out immediately. He wouldn't need his murder-bag - at least, he hardly expected to. He walked along the corridor to the sergeants' office, and saw Gorlay and two others, each busy at high desks; form filling was a kind of plague at the Yard.

Gorlay looked up, and started.

'Tell the operator that I'll be out for an hour or more, will you? And I may have to telephone for my bag - if I do, bring it by car to South Africa House. If you're not around make sure someone is.'

'Right, sir!'

Roger went along the corridors and out the back way, across the Yard, into Parliament Street, and then along Whitehall. It was a wonderful Indian summer, and he was wearing a light weight suit which he had bought in Australia only the previous year; it wasn't often he had a chance to use it here at home.

Whitehall, the colour of its older buildings neutralized by the bright sun, had a kind of splendour which it was hard to forget and yet easy not to notice. He wondered why he was acutely aware of it now – its breadth, the distant view, the sight of Nelson atop his column, the newer buildings which in themselves seemed so stark and bare, yet which somehow merged with the old ministry buildings. He went past the Horse Guards where a hundred or so late season tourists stood staring at two guardsmen sitting still as statues on their black horses, red cloaks and burnished helmets a reminder of dead glories. Dead? Roger saw the sweep of Trafalgar Square, glanced across at the Admiralty Arch and down the Mall, which looked cool and beautifully green. Dead glories? Were they so dead?

He now knew why he was thinking so much about them and not noticing so much today. It had nothing to do with the tourists or the clicking cameras; it was because of the way his thoughts had quickened when he had been told there was a problem in South Africa House. If one looked up

South Africa in a gazetteer, one found it listed under 'Foreign Countries', but somehow that seemed wrong, whatever one might think politically. In fact, of course, it was very difficult to think of South Africa without being influenced by the background of the politics which had brought about the change from 'Commonwealth' to 'Foreign'

He crossed Trafalgar Square at the end of the Strand, and turned towards the massive building on the right He went in. The hall was cool and spacious, and the commissionaire as Cockney as any London policeman; in fact, he *was* the next best thing to a member of the Force, and when he recognized Roger he drew himself up much as Gorlay had done.

'Afternoon, Mr West!'

'Hallo, Baker couldn't get into another uniform quick enough, I see.' Roger saw the half proffered hand, and shook it, callouses and all. 'You can't have been away more than a year.'

'Two and a half years, sir. Amazing how time flies, isn't it? It wasn't so much the money,' he confided. 'It was doing nothing that got me down. Live in a flat, you see. My wife can look after the window box, and she soon got tired of having me about the house Who do you want to see, sir?'

Roger almost told him, but the inborn caution, which made the difference between a born policeman and merely a good one, stepped in, and he grinned.

'Public Relations I forget the chap's name.'

'Mr Morgan that would be, sir. Second floor. Take the lift, and . . .'

It seemed to Roger that Baker's voice was still echoing in his ears when he reached the Public Relations office. He was welcomed into a magnificently-walled room, with panelling rather like an ocean liner's, by a pleasant-looking, well-groomed young woman.

'Oh, Mr du Toit's on the next floor, sir. You've been misdirected. If you'll come this way . . .'

She had a slight accent, a pleasant perfume, a friendly and natural manner. By the time he reached an office marked *Consul-General – Inquiries*, Roger's mood was very much better than it had been since he had first heard Gorlay.

When a middle-aged man asked if he had an appointment he realized that, whatever the reason for his visit, it wasn't widely known; it was a good thing he had been careful. He was led by one secretary to a second, and finally into another richly panelled room, with high windows and a high ceiling; one wall carved with wild animals, the opposite wall with covered wagons and men and women in olden-day dress. From a desk larger than Hardy's and set in front of the main window, a very tall man stood up. Roger had a curious impression that the man was watching him almost with suspicion, certainly with wariness. Yet his manner could not have been more pleasant; his voice was also very slightly accented He was probably older than he looked, which was about thirty-five.

He shook hands, and motioned to a leather-seated armchair.

'Please sit down, Mr West ... A cigarette? ... So you are cutting down on smoking; nearly everyone seems to be.' Du Toit waited for Roger to sit, went back to his own chair, and placed his hands on the desk in front of him, the fingers linked 'Mr West, I am indeed glad to meet you, and to know that you have been selected for this very delicate task. A man of very great prominence in South Africa left Johannesburg by air four days ago. It is believed that he reached London Airport on Monday, but since then no one has any idea where he may have gone. I think I should say at once that we do not believe he would have disappeared of his own accord. I am sure you see our problem.'

## 2

## *MYSTERY*

ROGER DID not answer immediately, partly because he did not quite know what to say, partly because he wanted time to try to sum up the man as well as the situation. As he

sat appraising du Toit, he realized there was a third factor: simply that he was not considering this in the way he would in Australia House, or even the United States Embassy. He did not believe that du Toit's counterpart in either place would watch him so intently; almost warily.

Du Toit waited until it almost became a test of who could stay silent the longer. Slowly, Roger found himself relaxing, and he smiled faintly as he said:

'I see a little of the problem.'

'I will give you all the details which we have so far, including' du Toit placed his right hand on a pale-pink folder – 'the report from our Pretoria and Johannesburg police headquarters.'

'One basic thing first,' Roger said.

'Yes?'

'Is this a political matter?'

Du Toit did not stir in his chair, but it seemed to Roger that the pressure of his hand on the reports suddenly became much firmer.

'Would it make any difference to you, as an official of the Metropolitan Police, if it were political?'

'As a policeman, of course not. As a person it might, and the trouble is that the two sometimes overlap.'

'At least you admit your prejudice,' said du Toit. He withdrew his hand; he also seemed to withdraw into himself. 'I am not sure how I shoul I react to this, Superintendent.' He paused again, as if to begin another battle of silence.

'I've probably misled you,' Roger said hastily 'If I thought it were political I would probably lean over backwards to try to make sure that my own political leanings wouldn't affect any action I took, or my thinking as a policeman I didn't admit any prejudice, anyhow; I don't think I have any.'

'If you haven't, you are truly a remarkable man,' said du Toit. He smiled more freely than he had since Roger had entered the office. 'But of course you are remarkable, or I would not be talking to you like this. I should be much more reserved. To answer your question - no, this is not a political matter. The missing person is not connected in politics or in

social affairs in any way. In so far as anything which happens in South Africa is assumed to have a political association, it might be regarded as political by some.'

Roger said frowningly: 'I don't quite follow.'

'I mean that if this man were to have disappeared of his own accord, if he were to be found dead, for instance, then there are people in this country and in most of the world who would infer a political reason It would be nonsense and it would be wrong, but it would be said. Don't misunderstand me,' went on du Toit, raising his hands. 'I know that people do leave South Africa for political reasons, and I think they are mistaken to do so. But I am sure this man did not. He was coming to see an engineering company in England, and might have gone on from here to see another company in the United States. He is a director and substantial stockholder in one of our mining companies, as well as the research director. He also owns one of the very few independent diamond mines in South Africa Because of these things his work was of importance to South Africa's economy and therefore of interest to the Government, but ' Du Toit paused, then slowly smiled; in that moment he made Roger warm to him as an individual. 'But the Government was as anxious as he and his company for his success.'

Roger said: 'I see.'

'You make that remark seem very profound, Superintendent.'

'I'm not feeling at all profound. If your Government's anxious for the man's success, then there are bound to be people who are anxious for his failure, simply because such a failure would be sure to rub off on the Government. That's too simple to be profound.'

'I think I would disagree with you' Du Toit stood up. 'But I have no reason at all, no one has any reason at all, to suspect direct political intervention of any kind.' He moved towards Roger, but at the same time looked at one of the panels. 'Much of this wood carving is done by Bantu craftsmen, Superintendent. You have observed the animals from our game parks, and the historical tableaux of the great treks, but I did not notice you glance towards any of those

behind you.' He led the way to the far end of the room, where the carvings were of tall, spindly derricks, of big slag heaps, of mine shafts. Roger studied them as du Toit went on: 'We share a lot of things with Great Britain, problems as well as internal and raw-material situations. It would be very important to you to find oil, wouldn't it?'

Roger looked at him sharply.

'Very.'

'It would be equally important to us.'

'And this missing man was coming to see English manufacturers of machinery which might help you to find oil? Or to bring it up once you found it?'

'Don't jump too quickly to conclusions, please. There is no certainty that oil is the motive – only that it was one of his reasons for coming here. He has many industrial interests. He was coming to discuss arrangements for boring plant, and to arrange terms for engineers and surveyors to go to certain parts of South Africa where we have reason to think there might be oil. Very few people were aware of this. His company tells us that only two other members of the management knew that this was included in his itinerary of the United Kingdom. As far as we can find out no one else apart from the Government was fully aware of his purpose. The police at home are investigating that, but the immediate problem here is to find out what happened to him when he reached London Airport.' Du Toit turned away from the panels, and moved back to the desk, but he did not go to his chair. 'He travelled alone, for secrecy's sake. He was not met at the airport. All his plans were made personally, although we were informed. We expected a call from him yesterday morning, and when it did not come we inquired at the hotel where he had reserved a room. He had not arrived.'

'What hotel?' asked Roger.

'The Georgian, in the Strand.'

'What inquiries did you make at the airport?'

'We simply asked if he—'

'Supposing we start using his name,' suggested Roger.

'Very well, but even that is not as simple as it may sound.

His real name is Van der Lunn. The name under which he was travelling was Lewis.'

'May we use Van der Lunn?'

'If you wish.'

'I think it may help,' said Roger. 'You simply asked if he was on the passenger list, and if all the passengers had been on board the plane – is that it?'

'Yes. They had been.'

'So, presumably, he got off the plane here. Are the details there?' Roger pointed to the files. 'As well as the times of arrival and departure of the plane, and all the relevant information?'

'Yes.'

'Mr du Toit, exactly what do you want me to do? Or the Yard to do? Spell it out for me, will you?'

Where another man might have said, 'You know already,' du Toit moved round his desk, sat down slowly, and began to speak with great deliberation, almost as if he felt that he had to consider each individual word before uttering it. Roger had an impression of a man of high intelligence and great sensitivity, and also the impression of one who had taught himself to pick his way carefully through a bed of thorns.

'I will endeavour to, Superintendent. The Ambassador would be most grateful if you will investigate all the circumstances of the apparent disappearance of Mr Paul Van der Lunn. He would also be grateful if such an investigation could be carried out without attracting public attention. So far as we now know, the Press has no knowledge of the disappearance. We feel it likely that if the knowledge becomes general then such allusions as you yourself have foreseen will be inevitable. If, in your considered view, it will be necessary for Mr Van der Lunn's disappearance to become public knowledge, then we would appreciate it if you will tell us so as much in advance as possible, please.'

Du Toit leaned back as he finished, with his left hand resting lightly on the pale-pink folder. Roger had a feeling that he had only just resisted the impulse to add: 'Have I made myself clear?'

'In your view, what would justify publicity?' inquired Roger.

'We would, of course, bow to your judgement. For our part we would think it necessary if there seemed no other way of tracing Mr Van der Lunn. We would also consider it necessary if you had reason to believe that he had been – injured, or killed.'

Roger flashed: 'Do you seriously think he's been murdered?'

'No. We simply accept the possibility.'

'Had you any reason to believe that he was in danger?'

'None.'

'Let me study the file for half an hour while I'm here," Roger said. 'It might help me to ask questions of detail, and get us off to a quicker start.' Du Toit handed him the file, and he went on: 'Any corner where I'm on my own will do. I needn't take up your time while I'm looking through the reports.'

Du Toit's rather thin, well shaped lips curved widely when he smiled.

'You are most considerate,' he said drily. 'There is a smaller room next door.' He led the way to a door on the right, and the nearest of the three secretaries stood up from his desk. 'Mr Hoyt, will you arrange for some tea to be taken to Superintendent West?' He moved across and opened another door, which led on to a small but beautifully-appointed room, more like a study than an office. 'I hope this will be suitable, Superintendent.'

'Perfectly,' Roger said warmly.

He was halfway through a report from a man who signed himself 'J. Jameson' when the door opened on a light tap, and a tall, well-built, immaculate Negro came in, carrying a tea-tray with cake and biscuits. His smile was easy and bright.

'Mr du Toit asked me to tell you, Superintendent, that if you need anything you have only to summon me by pressing the red push button, or if you wish to speak to him, the green telephone is connected directly with his office. The black one is a line to the Post Office Exchange.'

'That's fine,' Roger said 'Thanks.'

He watched the door as the other man went out, and began to smile again. Du Toit had not really said a direct word, but he had managed to create exactly the impression that he had wanted, he was busy testing for prejudice. But the reflection soon faded Roger turned back to the report, reflecting almost ruefully that he would not expect a better one from any of the men at the Yard. The times, the people questioned, the ground covered, even the reactions of individuals, were all here. Yet it told him little more than du Toit had outlined.

Roger spent three quarters of an hour studying them, then moved the direct-line telephone towards him and dialled the Yard. In a moment he was speaking to Hardy.

Hardy listened . . .

'All right,' he said when Roger finished. 'I'll have the men and a car ready so that you can start for the airport as soon as you're back. No need to refer to me; do whatever you think best.'

At least he was in a reasonable mood.

'Thanks,' Roger said. He put that instrument down with one hand and lifted the telephone to du Toit's office with the other. 'May I come in?'

'Of course. I will come for you ' By the time Roger reached the door, it opened and du Toit appeared. The Negro was standing at some filing cabinets in a corner of the secretaries' office; he didn't look round.

'What I would like is to meet Lieutenant Jameson,' Roger said. 'His reports are particularly lucid And I'd like him to come with me to London Airport, if that's practical I might be able to dig out more information there, and Jameson will be able to show me exactly what he did when he was there. Is he available?'

'At once,' du Toit said promptly He leaned towards his desk and pressed a bell. 'Do you think his reports were comprehensive enough?'

'As far as I can tell, yes,' replied Roger He heard the door open behind him, but it was not until the newcomer spoke

that he realized who it was; even then he did not realize the significance of his presence.

'You rang, sir?' It was the Negro.

'Yes, Lieutenant,' du Toit said. 'Superintendent West wants you to go with him to London Airport, and will require all the assistance you can give him. I think you have already met Lieutenant Jameson, Superintendent. He is an officer in our National Police Force, seconded here for special duties.'

Roger turned round.

Jameson was giving his free, frank smile.

Roger chuckled.

'I won't pretend that didn't catch me bending,' he said, and without thinking held out his hand. As he did so, he had a momentary qualm: was it the thing to do? Jameson quickly dispelled any doubts; there was nothing either timid or hesitant about the way he put out his hand, and his grip was firm.

'I will help in every way I can,' he promised.

'First question,' Roger said. 'Do you know Mr Paul Van der Lunn?'

'Oh yes, sir.'

'And, of course, the lieutenant fully understands the situation, and the dangers of misunderstanding,' du Toit said. 'Thank you for your help, Superintendent.'

'I hope it soon leads to finding Van der Lunn,' Roger said.

## 3

## *THE AIRPORT*

As they drove towards the tunnel which took the road beneath the runways at the airport, a jet came hurtling out of the skies as if it would skim the very top of the police-car, dark gases pouring from its engines like the angry breath of some giant monster. As they drove along, Roger next to

Jameson at the back, black-haired Chief Inspector Klemm next to the driver – Detective Sergeant Liss – the plane touched down very gently. Soon it taxied out of sight behind the airport buildings. A dozen other aircraft were on the huge field, and almost as soon as the noise of the first one faded, another took off, roaring as if it were carrying thunder into the heavens.

The Superintendent whom Roger knew best at the airport was on holiday; his second-in command was Hammerton, a man whom Roger did not know well, but who was reputed to be a good detective with a high conceit of himself. The Airport Police were quite distinct from the Metropolitan Police, but they worked well together, and liaised closely.

The two shook hands, and Hammerton gave a rather sardonic smile.

'Nice to see you, Handsome. Still don't trust us, I see.'

'What have I done?' asked Roger.

Hammerton nodded to Klemm, whose black hair was much too heavily oiled. He had rather thin, sallow features and deepset eyes, which shone as he smiled at Jameson.

'The Yard never believes that anyone else is capable of doing their job properly, do they, Lieutenant?'

'If that is so I have yet to find it out,' replied Jameson

'Can't afford to sit on the fence too long when you're dealing with the Yard,' said Hammerton. They were in his office, one window of which looked over a part of the airfield. The atmosphere was a little uncanny, because the only sounds in here came from the men. This seemed to make the airfield remote, as if the roaring of aircraft and all other outside sounds were imagined and not real. 'Still looking for Mr Lewis?'

'We are most anxious to find him.'

'Still hush hush?' Hammerton asked Roger.

'Very.'

'That's a pity.'

'Why?'

'Because the one man who might be able to help us is a newspaperman,' answered Hammerton. 'He was here to meet someone else off the aircraft Lewis arrived on, and

believe me he wouldn't miss much. But if you question him he'll put two and two together, and make five out of it in *The Daily Globe*. Such as calling Lewis, Van der Lunn.'

'We might have to resort to the newspaperman,' Roger said. 'Have you done any double-checking?'

'Some.'

'Anything else turned up?'

'Only a few details,' answered Hammerton. 'Van der Lunn was on the flight all right. The crew had two days off and have just come back for another flight to Johannesburg – there's a change in stewards, but that's not unusual. I talked to the second pilot, who keeps his eyes open, and to one of the stewardesses. Quite reliable,' Hammerton added with a glance at Jameson. 'I showed them a photograph and they both say that he was on board. He wasn't well, though.'

'Not well?' asked Jameson. For the first time there was something like eagerness in his voice.

'Didn't eat much, didn't drink much, just kept himself to himself. The plane touched down at Nairobi and Cairo, but he didn't get off for the usual walk round the airfield. I can tell you another thing,' Hammerton went on, with obvious satisfaction. 'I've checked with Customs, and they recognized him – he had one suitcase and one briefcase, with overnight things in one, and some engineering journals and papers in the other. They didn't search, just glanced at them casually. He didn't seem well, and a porter led him off. The porter took him to the lounge, and left him. We haven't been able to trace him since. We might if we asked the taxi-drivers, the porters, and all the rest of the *hoi polloi*, but something would be bound to leak about his identity.'

'You aren't sure whether he went off by taxi, or private car, or by the air terminal bus?' Roger said.

'Not the bus. I was able to check with one of the stewardesses – she travelled on it, too.'

'This is at once disappointing and yet most thorough,' Jameson observed. He was looking hard at Hammerton. 'I am very grateful.'

'Can't leave things undone so that the Yard can come and

tell us how to do our job,' Hammerton said drily. 'Care to see the crew while they're here, Handsome?'

'What time do they take off?'

'Seven o'clock.'

'Then we've a couple of hours,' Roger said. 'I'd like to do one or two other things first. That porter—'

'He's gone but he knows nothing more. He was too anxious to get another job.'

'What are the chances of finding the taxi drivers who were here when the plane came in?'

'We'll spread the word and try to find out. They'll contact us if they're regulars, but if they just brought someone in from the Big Smoke they would only wait long enough to pick up a fare going back. The only way to trace them then would be a general request through newspapers or television. That would bring the reporters on us like a pack of hounds, but you know that, don't you?'

'Yes,' said Roger. 'May I use your phone?'

'Help yourself,' Hammerton waved a big hand towards the instrument on his desk. The operator answered almost at once.

'Get me the editorial department of *The Globe* newspaper, will you?' He held on, aware of Hammerton's almost comically-startled expression. Then another telephone bell rang. Hammerton answered it, and Roger heard him say:

'Can't it wait?' There was a pause before the airport man went on ungraciously. 'Oh, all right, I'll come.' He put the receiver down heavily, and spoke to Klemm. 'Some trouble over a packet of industrial diamonds. Customs wants me. Sorry.' He nodded to Roger and Jameson and went out. As the door closed, a man said: 'Editorial,' into Roger's left ear, and Jameson spoke quite urgently into his right. 'Excuse me, Superintendent.'

'This is Superintendent West of New Scotland Yard,' Roger said into the telephone. 'Ask Mr Soames or his deputy to speak to me urgently, please.' He covered the mouthpiece with his hand and looked up at the South African. 'What was that?'

'If it was Mr Van der Lunn on that aircraft, sir, he was behaving in a most unusual manner.'

'Why?'

'Mr Van der Lunn does not like staying in aeroplanes if he can avoid it. He is a restless passenger, and whenever he has a chance to leave the aircraft, he does so. I would not like to be sure it was Mr Van der Lunn.'

'Nice point,' Roger said. He heard the newspaperman's voice, and added quickly: 'Check with Klemm, will you? Keep it under our hats for the time being ... Mr Soames? ... I'm fine, thanks, but with a bit of a problem on my hands ... Yes, I would feel funny without one, wouldn't I?' he laughed mechanically, thinking of Jameson's doubts about the identity of the man on the aircraft. 'As a matter of fact one of your men might be able to help us, and I'd like to get in touch with him.'

He knew that Soames was a kind of one man band at *The Globe*, one of the old type of Fleet Street editor whose chief fault was reluctance to delegate any real authority; but he was known to have the fierce loyalty of his staff.

'Who d'you want?' he asked.

'Nightingale.'

The silence which followed surprised Roger, for Soames was not one to hesitate. The delay went on for so long that Roger wondered if they had been cut off. The other two were whispering together by the window, Klemm's black glossy hair gleaming in the light, Jameson's a mass of small, tight curls, reflecting nothing.

'What do you know about Nightingale?' demanded Soames, abruptly.

'I'm asking you where he is.'

'Don't you know?'

Roger was tempted to ask the editor to stop stalling, then realized that there must be a strong reason for his attitude, so he answered mildly:

'No, I don't. He was at London Airport on Monday afternoon, and I'm looking for a man who came off a plane and hasn't been heard of since. I thought Nightingale might be able to help; he keeps his eyes open.'

'He hasn't been heard of since,' Soames echoed.

'That's right.'

'I mean Nightingale.'

'Nightingale what?'

'Hasn't been heard of since.' Soames sounded very gruff.

This time it was Roger's turn to be reduced to silence. Although he understood what the other man had said, it was almost impossible to credit it. He shifted his position so that he could squat on the corner of the desk, and asked:

'Do you mean he really hasn't been seen and hasn't reported since he came to the airport?'

'That's what I mean.'

'And you don't know where he is?'

'I don't. West, what makes you want to talk to him?' Now there was an anxious note in the editor's voice 'Don't give me that stuff about wondering if he happened to notice anything.'

'How long are you going to be at your office?' asked Roger.

'Until after midnight.'

'May I come and talk about this?'

'Whenever you like.'

'If Nightingale shows up, send a message to the Yard, will you?'

'Yes. Can't you give me a clue?'

'I've a missing man to find, and so have you. I didn't know of any connection before and I don't now, but obviously there could be. What job was Nightingale covering?'

'Diamond smuggling,' answered *The Globe* editor promptly. 'I don't know whether you've been told about it, but a lot of industrial diamonds are being smuggled out of South Africa. They're sold to big users in various countries, at cut prices – and a lot of them are then stolen from the buyers, who can't do much about it because they've bought diamonds they know have been stolen. Did you know about this?'

'I knew some had been stolen in New York and Amsterdam,' said Roger. 'We've been asked to keep our eyes open.' He had little doubt that Hammerton was on that

investigation now. 'How many countries are involved to your knowledge?'

'Seven.'

Roger hoped that he showed no sign of the shock that total gave him; in fact, the Yard knew very little about this racket.

'Wheels within wheels,' Soames went on. 'Nightingale has been on the story for several weeks. Is that what your man was involved in?'

'Not as far as I know,' Roger said. 'I'll come straight up to your office.'

'Don't let anyone see you or I'll have half my staff trying to sell me a story of crime inside *The Globe*,' said Soames.

He rang off.

Jameson and Klemm had finished talking, so Roger had to push this new development to the back of his mind, and consider Jameson's theory, that the man at the airport had not been Van der Lunn. At least Hammerton wasn't back yet. He had been called out by Customs officers about industrial diamonds, and that seemed too much for coincidence. Why did one always think of South Africa when thinking of diamonds? He mustn't forget that Soames didn't. *Seven* countries. He watched the alert face of the African and the sallow face of Klemm. There was something in common between them, a kind of restrained eagerness.

'Let's have it,' Roger said.

'Everything I know about Mr Van der Lunn contradicts what we have been told about the passenger,' insisted Jameson. 'I think it is certain that if it was Mr Van der Lunn, then he was sick. Inspector Klemm thinks perhaps it would be a good idea if we were to question the crew of the aircraft and show them a better photograph of Mr Van der Lunn. We are not likely to be able to interview them again for some days.'

'Unless you'd like to do it yourself now,' Klemm said.

'Jameson knows a lot more about it than I do. Have a go at them,' Roger agreed. 'Don't forget that one of them might have seen the passenger get off – the fact that the

stewardess and the second pilot didn't, doesn't mean a thing. Klemm, you know Nightingale of *The Globe*, don't you?'

'I know what a long nose he's got.'

'He's missing, too,' said Roger. 'And since the night that Mr Van der Lunn was last seen. Thread him into the questions – the crew probably knew him. He was chasing a story on stolen and smuggled industrial diamonds – any possibility that Van der Lunn might know anything about such diamonds, Lieutenant?'

'He would know something, yes. He is a director of de Beers, and he also owns a small mine which he inherited from his father. It is an independent producing mine, but sells only to de Beers, the diamond monopoly. Also he surveys for blue dirt as well as all kinds of minerals such as oil, uranium, gold, platinum, and copper. He would not smuggle or deal in stolen diamonds. He is a very wealthy man, but ...' Jameson broke off. 'It is very interesting indeed, Superintendent.'

'When you're sure you've done all you can here, get back to the Yard,' Roger said. 'Don't report to South Africa House until we've been able to talk things over.' He gave the lieutenant a reassuring smile as he went towards the door. As he reached it, it opened and Hammerton came in, obviously not pleased.

'Found anything?' Roger asked.

'Sand where there should have been diamonds – can't do very much with a man who's got two small wash-leather bags full of sand rolled up in his pyjamas and a pair of socks, though, can you?' Seeing Roger's expression, he added hastily: 'Don't worry, we know the chap, and I'm having him followed. Queer thing, though.'

'What is?'

'We get a lot of whispers about diamonds being brought into the country, but never find any. We've had a lot of near misses like this one. You know we're on the lookout for packets being smuggled from New York and Amsterdam, don't you?'

'Yes.' *And* five other countries, thought Roger.

'Where are you off to?' asked Hammerton.

'I'm going back to town,' Roger answered 'Jameson and Klemm are going to talk to the crew, and there's a job you can do for me if you will.'

'What is it?'

'Let me know all you can about a *Globe* reporter named Nightingale,' Roger said. 'How often he's been here, who he talks to, whether he meets any special planes, anything you can dig up – including whether he has any colleagues working on the airfield with him. Think you might have some word for me by eight o'clock tonight?'

'I'll try to,' said Hammerton. 'I never did like Nightingale. I hope he's got himself into trouble.'

Roger was very thoughtful on his way back to the Yard. Butterworth, the Detective-Superintendent who knew more about the ways of diamond thieves than anyone else in the Yard, was out on a job, but a Chief Inspector who often worked with him reported that no official requests for help over diamonds had been made except from New York and Amsterdam.

'Industrial and small diamonds are known to have been stolen in small parcels from Paris, Bangkok, West Berlin, and Madrid, though. We haven't been asked for help.'

So the Yard did know more than he, Roger, had realized; that was cheering.

Roger left for Fleet Street almost at once.

## 4

## *THE EDITOR DECIDES*

The Strand, with the Law Courts towering on the left, stretched almost empty of cars towards Fleet Street, where the road narrowed and the buildings on either side became massive and modern giants towering over the midgets of the past. Newspaper headlines and newspaper names seemed to

be on every hoarding and every window. Six huge red buses in a row came tearing down from Ludgate Circus as Roger's car swung to cross the road; the driver was going to do a U-turn. 'Police-cars can do anything,' the cynics would complain, but this wasn't marked as a police-car. The driver pulled skilfully behind the end bus and stopped almost directly outside the office of *The Globe*. A pale faced policeman came strolling along, as if he had all the time in the world, the words: 'May I see your licence?' on his lips. The driver got out, winked at him, and opened the door for Roger. The policeman began to stare thoughtfully across the road.

*The Globe* was not only London's oldest daily newspaper, it was housed in London's oldest newspaper building, a Victorian relic of which a lot of people were proud and about which a few were sentimental. Inside was a panelled hall, scratched and worn, leading to passages, lifts, small boys waiting to run errands, old commissionaires who looked as if they were waiting to die Roger slipped into an open grille lift which was about to close; the lift-man nodded, as if he were weary of going up and down, up and down. A small, greasy-haired boy with some envelopes and a middle aged woman with dyed red hair and too much make-up both got out on the floor marked *Advertisements*.

'Editorial, please,' Roger said.

Editorial was a maze of passages created by wooden partitions which hid most of the workers from sight, but did not keep out the noise Typewriters clattered with urgent speed, teletype machines ticked their gossip, a dozen telephone bells seemed to be ringing on a muted note, dozens of people were talking at the same time. One man kept saying:

'Speak up, can't hear you . . . Speak up . . Speak up!'

All this noise floated over the tops of the partition walls, but at the far end of a passage some offices were completely walled off. One of the doors was marked: *Editor*. Roger went in. An unexpected beauty of a girl, charming as a May fair model, elegant but not sleek, with a smile which was bright but not forced or brazen, looked up at him from a desk.

'Mr West?'

'Yes.'

'Mr Soames would like you to go in at once,' she said. She stood up from her desk, which was quite large and tidy, although there were a lot of papers on it, including copies of the evening's newspapers and some of that very morning's. She went to a communicating door, and it would have been impossible not to notice her legs, beautiful legs, and the way her dress gave subtle emphasis to her figure. She opened the door, called 'Mr West' to an unseen occupant and stood aside for Roger to enter. They had to pass very closely, and their bodies touched. Roger did not recognize the perfume which she used, but it had a rare, almost heady quality.

Soames was at his huge square desk, a mountain of a desk on which newspapers, letters, proofs, and oddments of copy-paper made the snow on the peaks, and the ink-stands, ash-trays, telephones, bottles, glasses, tea pot, milk-jug, and cups made the foothills. He half-rose from a big old-fashioned swivel chair, a rugged and chunky man in his sixties, with a lot of grizzled hair and a stubble of yesterday's beard in the deep crevices of his face. He had shaggy eyebrows and the deepest of deep blue, penetrating eyes.

He stretched out his hands, gripped, and dropped back into his chair.

'Not a day older,' he almost jeered. 'Still the Yard's glamour boy, I see.'

'Still the same peculiar sense of humour,' Roger retorted, sitting on a chair placed comfortably for him. The girl had gone out. 'What's this about Nightingale?'

'And still on the ball. Who's going to give first – you or me?'

'Off the record?' asked Roger.

'Must it be?'

'Absolutely, for the time being.'

'I'm not going to like that,' complained Soames.

'Then let's just talk about Nightingale,' Roger said. 'He was after smugglers of industrial diamonds, expected to find someone on that plane, presumably went after them, and

didn't come back. So he could be still on the trail or he could have met with an accident.'

'Right,' Soames confirmed. 'You win. Off the record, what's going on?'

'Do you know a man named Paul Van der Lunn?' asked Roger.

Soames shifted back in his chair, and seemed to settle into it as awkwardly as a huge piece of granite. He had a prominent jaw, which jutted just now. He gripped the padded arms of his chair and his fingers began to knead the worn red leather.

'The director of the Afra Mining Company?'

'Yes.'

'So it *was* him,' said Soames. He breathed out through his nostrils, as if trying to pretend that he was some dragon whose belly was filled with fire and brimstone. 'I should never have agreed to keeping this off the record. Nightingale telephoned from the airport — that was the last thing we heard of him. He said he thought Van der Lunn was on the plane, but couldn't be sure. He went after someone else, and I checked to find out if Van der Lunn was in town. We asked South Africa House, asked the London office of the Afra Mining Company, and asked the news agencies who had been at London Airport. Each time the answer was the same: No. But it *was* him.'

'Wasn't Nightingale positive enough?'

'Nothing is sure enough for us except absolute proof.'

'Did Nightingale speak to you about Van der Lunn?'

'Yes.'

'Do I have to use a hammer and chisel to get the story out of you?' demanded Roger.

'You could try telling me why you're interested.'

'All right,' said Roger, promptly. 'Van der Lunn was travelling under an assumed name — Lewis. He started out on the plane from Johannesburg as far as we can tell, and was supposed to have disembarked at London Airport. He wasn't seen afterwards. We've checked closely, and there's some doubt as to whether it was Van der Lunn. He didn't behave like himself, and, if it was him, then he was either ill or

frightened – we don't know which.' Roger paused. But as Soames simply waited, those deep, deep-set eyes unwinking, he went on. 'South Africa House made preliminary inquiries, got nowhere, and called us in. The job was handed to me by Hardy from the Commissioner, and I was ordered to make sure that it was kept secret. Do you know du Toit of South Africa House?'

'Slightly.'

'What's his reputation?'

'He's okay.'

'He convinced me that there are good reasons for secrecy so (*a*) I'm under Home Office orders to say nothing, and (*b*) I'm sure that it's right to say nothing.'

'So don't let me do anything to make you change your mind,' retorted Soames drily. After a long pause, he went on: 'You were going to ask me something.'

Roger thought back, and at the same time reflected how much he liked this man, that Soames's reputation was at least as good as du Toit's, and that Soames's political convictions as well as the editorial slant of his newspaper were anti-South African, or perhaps, more accurately, anti-Apartheid.

'I was going to ask what Nightingale said about Van der Lunn and also what else he said.'

'He told me that he thought this passenger was Van der Lunn,' declared Soames. 'He also said that he stood by at Customs and learned that Van der Lunn was travelling with a passport in the name of Lewis. That this made it seem even more likely that there was a story in it for us. Did I want him to follow his nose and go after Van der Lunn, or did I want him to stay with the industrial diamonds job? He knew that I would always like to get in first on anything which might have a political slant on Anglo South African relationship, so he gave me the chance. But he really wanted to find the truth about those diamonds. He's been on that particular job for over six months, and it's become almost an obsession with him. A lot of parcels of diamonds, mostly industrial or for costume pieces and bought illegally, are being stolen from many parts of the world. From South Africa, Amsterdam, New York—'

'I know,' Roger interjected.

'So you should. Well, Nightingale must crack it, to prove he's the man he thinks he is. I left him to find his diamond smuggler, while I put another man on to the Van der Lunn story. I took this chap off next morning because there was no lead I can let you see his notes, if you like.'

'I'd like to see them very much,' Roger said.

Soames leaned forward, shifted some proofs and a newspaper from a heap, and disclosed an old-fashioned inter-office speaking box. He flicked up a lever.

'Yes, Mr Soames?' said the girl in the outer office.

'Got those notes from Bennett?'

'Yes.'

'Good girl. Bring 'em in.'

'Yes. Mr Soames—'

'Well?'

'You said you did not want to be interrupted, but Mr Ossenden has been trying to get you. I said you were out of the office, but would call him the moment you got back.'

'Oh, did you.' Soames seemed to glower 'Get him for me, and put him through into the board room, I'll take the call there. Bring those notes in to Mr West here and give him any help he needs, especially the background on Nightingale's disappearance. Nothing in from Nightingale, is there?'

'Nothing at all.'

Soames grunted, flicked the lever down, pushed his chair back, and glowered at the wall above Roger's head. Ossenden was the chairman of *The Globe*'s directors, the only man who could tell Soames what to do, and it seemed obvious that one of the periodic clashes between the two men was reaching a climax. Soames stared down at Roger, but was hardly aware of him. He gripped the arms of the chair more tightly, and stood up. Only then was the truth about this big and powerful man revealed; he was crippled by osteo-arthritis, and could not stand upright. He had to lean against the desk as he moved, and with an almost savage gesture he snatched at a heavy walking-stick hooked on to a knob at the back of his chair.

'Why can't I come back in five minutes?' Roger asked, and wondered whether Soames's fierce pride would make him resent reference to his infirmity.

Soames flashed a grin which bared his big, slightly-discoloured teeth and a gleam or two of gold fillings.

'Because what I have to say must not be heard out there, and I'm not used to keeping my voice down when I want to speak my mind.' He stamped off, using a small door in a corner away from the door to the secretary's office, thrust it back with the ferrule of his stick and pushed again as it swung into him before he had got through. It closed behind him. Roger could hear the thump of the stick, and for those few seconds thought only of the editor, and his brave spirit and his infirmity. Then he moved to his chair and sat down, thinking over everything that had been said, and the coincidental thread of the industrial diamonds.

Was that simply conscience?

There was a tap at the door and the girl came in, carrying some manila folders. She had a grace of movement which matched the rest of her. Her hair was on the dark side of gold, waved but not curly; just right. She had honey coloured eyes, and Roger realized that it was their colour which made her so unusual.

Roger asked: 'Is the arthritis getting any worse?'

'Yes,' she answered. 'It's agony for him to move. It hurts to see him, doesn't it?'

'When I first knew him, he played cricket as well as tennis and soccer.'

'So he did when I first knew him,' the girl replied. She smiled at Roger's surprised expression. 'Yes, I've known him all my life. He's my uncle. I call him Mr Soames because we decided that it was the best thing to do in the office. Everybody here knows the relationship, of course, but we don't have to throw it in their faces.'

'I suppose not,' said Roger drily. He drew a deep breath. 'Let me have a look at those notes, will you?'

The girl opened the folder out on the desk in front of him. He continued to sit while she stood close to him; very close to him. He did not actually wish that she wouldn't, but he

was a little too aware of her, unable to concentrate as much as he knew he should. She pointed to one or two notes written in a sprawling hand; her fingers were long and shapely, and she used natural varnish on nicely shaped nails.

'You see, Bennett telephoned all the usual places Then he went to South Africa House he saw a detective named Jameson and afterwards to the hotel where "Lewis" had booked in, but there was no trace of him. He went to the offices of the Afra Mining Company at a quarter past eleven that morning – Tuesday. They simply said that Mr Van der Lunn hadn't arrived and they assumed he had been delayed in South Africa.' The girl had a way of talking that was curiously like Soames's direct, economical, straight to the point. 'Here are the notes made of Mr Bennett's conversation with Mr Soames, too.'

Roger scanned through these; they added nothing to what Soames had told him.

'May I have copies?' he asked.

The girl selected a large envelope from the file.

'Mr Soames thought you might like photostat copies, so they're all in here.'

Roger laughed. 'Thanks.' He opened the envelope and glanced through the contents, mechanically checking that everything was there. 'How freely may you talk?'

She had moved away a little; not far, but noticeably. She looked down on him, smiling, almost laughing. At him? He wondered how old she was. Older than he had first thought, probably in her late twenties, although she might be only twenty four or five. She was rather slender bosomed, and yet the pale brown dress with its piping of dark green was most provocatively cut.

'I shall know where to stop,' she assured him. 'I really am my uncle's niece! What would you like to know?'

'What success did Nightingale have on the diamond-smuggling job?' asked Roger. 'Did he suspect anyone? Had he any contacts in the ring? That kind of thing.'

'Why do you want to know?'

'If he looked like cracking the ring, then it's conceivable the ring found a way to stop him.'

'Do you know Nightingale?' inquired the girl.

'Slightly.'

'Then you may not know him well enough to be sure that only one thing would stop him, Mr West. Either he's still working on the investigation or he's dead - or at least incapacitated.' She spoke as if there could be no possibility of doubt. 'But surely you're more interested in Bennett's report about the man who called himself Lewis.' When Roger didn't answer, she went on: 'You don't seriously think that the two cases might be connected, do you?'

Before Roger could answer, thudding sounds came from the next room. As the girl drew back from him, the inner door was thrust open, and Soames appeared, wielding his thick walking stick like a rapier, to keep the door back. He was grinning, obviously with satisfaction

'Faith, go along and tell Comp we'll run the first leader. He can scrap the other piece of nonsense.' Soames moved to his chair, hooked the stick behind, and supported himself on his powerful arms until he could drop into it. He grunted; the sound was almost a wince. He looked up at Roger tight-lipped, but apart from pain there was the fiery glint of triumph in his eyes. 'Did Faith give you everything you asked for?'

'Yes,' said Roger. 'But she didn't tell me everything I wanted to know – whether Nightingale thought he was close to the truth about the smuggling, for instance. Was he?'

'He certainly thought so.'

'Won't you be more specific?' Roger asked

After a long pause, Soames shifted forward until he rested his thick forearms on the desk; muscles bulged inside the sleeves of his jacket.

'I'd like to make a condition, and ask for the first chance of the Van der Lunn story when you can release it, but I'll leave that to your natural sense of justice.' There was a derisive note in his voice. 'Yes, he thought he was near the end of the hunt. He believed that the ring leader of a powerful smuggling organization was on Monday's plane. Whether he was right or wrong we shan't know until he reports.'

Roger said: 'If he reports. Talking of reporting . . .'

'Yes?'

'When are you going to report him missing?'

'Meaning, do we want you to look for him?'

'Yes.'

Soames hesitated, and then the fierce grin flashed again. This time he seemed to be even more amused than he had before, as if this was a great joke.

'We'll report him missing any time you'll agree to treat it as secret.'

Roger chuckled.

'As from now,' he promised. He stood up, leaned across the desk to shake hands, and went on: 'If you hear anything from or about Nightingale you'll let me know at once, won't you?'

'Yes.'

'Thanks. And how about letting me have photostat copies of the reports on his case, too?'

'The copies are in a thick envelope on Faith's desk. She'll give them to you as you go out.' Again there was that quick, powerful handshake. 'Let me know if you find Van der Lunn, won't you?'

## 5

## *THE SEARCH*

ROGER TURNED into his office at New Scotland Yard just before seven o'clock, took off his jacket and hung it on a peg of the hat-stand, lifted his telephone and said: 'Get my wife, will you?' rang off and rounded the desk and opened the files. He had already studied them in the car on the way from Fleet Street, and knew most of the information off by heart; he was checking how much he still had to impress on his memory. He was halfway through when his telephone bell rang He stretched out for it, and said:

'Guess who this is?'

'West, I hope,' said the Assistant Commissioner.

Roger nearly dropped the telephone, hardly knowing whether to laugh or to be extra cautious; it was usual for the operator to put him straight through to Janet, his wife.

'West,' Roger confirmed.

'How far have you got with the Van der Lunn investigation?'

'I've just come up from *Information*. A picture of Van der Lunn, who seems to have been travelling under a false passport, in the name of Paul Lewis, is going out to all London Divisions and other police forces tonight, for spot checking,' Roger said. 'We want to make sure that his body hasn't been found and isn't in some morgue. I've been to London Airport, and unless Klemm or Jameson—'

'Jameson?'

'A man seconded to the job from South Africa House.'

'That's all right.'

'Unless they've discovered something, and there's no report on my desk, I don't know any more about what happened to Van der Lunn than I did when I started. I do know that there's some doubt as to whether it was really Van der Lunn. There's even some doubt whether he really left South Africa. If it was him, then he was either ill or feigning, or else under some kind of pressure.'

'How did you get on at South Africa House?'

'As well as they hoped, I think.'

Hardy actually chuckled.

'Stay with this job all the time,' he said. 'Tell Janet that you won't know what home is like for the next few days.'

Janet would probably say that would be nothing new, but this wasn't the moment to find out whether Hardy would think that funny. Roger rang off, pencilled a note, and heard footsteps in the passage. As they drew nearer the door, his telephone bell rang again. This time he was more cautious.

'West speaking.'

'Very formal tonight, Mr West, aren't you?' This was Janet; and Janet nearly always made him feel good As he sat back, he had a momentary glimpse of Soames's niece, Faith, but it was gone in a flash, and he hardly noticed it.

'Hallo, darling,' Janet went on. 'I know what you're going to tell me. You're going to be late.'

'Late-ish, anyhow,' Roger said. 'What kind of day has it been?'

'When you start asking that kind of question you're going to be very late,' said Janet resignedly. 'Just average, dear Martin's up in his room with a fellow art student, female, talking earnestly about abstracts and modernism and all the rest. Richard telephoned to say he'll be late too, and not to get any supper ready for him.'

'Girl-friend?' inquired Roger.

'I shouldn't think so, but he may be fooling me.'

'Now would any of your family do that?' asked Roger. There was a tap at the door, but he didn't answer. 'Sweet, I must go. I'll make it just as soon as I can, but I might possibly be called out of London Don't be too surprised if I am'

'From this moment on, I'm expecting it,' Janet declared. 'I can't expect to have lunch *and* sleep with you on the same day, can I? Roger!'

'Now what?'

'Did you know you were going to be out tonight? Is that why you took me to lunch?'

'It would have been a good idea, but I didn't even give it a thought,' Roger said. 'When I get round to practising small deceits on you, I'll warn you in advance. Jan, I've two chaps almost breaking the door down. I must go See you.' He rang off, and paused, and reflected, and then called: 'Come in.' As the door opened he was thinking of Janet, and the fact that he seemed to be making these calls more and more often; that he was getting home later and later more often, too.

First Klemm and then Jameson came in, and as the reflections passed, Roger slid back to the Van der Lunn problem almost without thinking He waved to chairs, and they sat down; it was obvious from their expressions that they had no good news to report. Klemm looked hot and rather dejected, like a dishevelled and out of temper Spaniard Jameson was fresh and as immaculate as he had been in the office.

'Nothing,' Klemm said.

'I've got a lot of inquiries going out now,' said Roger. 'We may hear something during the night or tomorrow morning. Meanwhile ...' He told them the story of Nightingale's disappearance, and what Nightingale had been doing, watching Jameson all the time he spoke. Jameson had a gift for showing no expression, but there was a look about him, a tension at his lips, which suggested to Roger that he was probably holding his thoughts on leash.

Now, Roger said: 'How much do you know about this diamond stealing, Lieutenant?'

'I know it has been going on,' answered Jameson. 'It is not uncommon, you understand. Many parcels of diamonds which are consigned quite legally from Kimberley to the world's capitals are intercepted and stolen. That is always a matter for the national police to handle. We have reason to believe that smuggling diamonds out of the Union is on the increase. We at South Africa House have not been asked to act, although we have been informed. We hear indirectly that diamonds so smuggled are sold overseas, and often stolen back from the purchasers! Perhaps a kind of rough justice.' When Roger didn't comment, Jameson went on: 'Are you suggesting, sir, that these matters could be connected with Mr Van der Lunn's disappearance?'

'Yes, obviously.'

'To suspect Mr Van der Lunn of any part in smuggling is quite impossible,' Jameson said 'But -'

'Is it really?' Roger interrupted.

'I find it so.'

'How often does he come to London?'

Jameson answered very slowly in that rather husky and attractive voice: 'Perhaps once in three months, perhaps a little more often at certain times. He has so many business interests. But Mr West -' He broke off.

'I've a file from *The Globe* here giving all of Nightingale's findings and his opinions about the diamond troubles,' Roger said. 'And we've been working on the case – here's our file, as well as a copy of the file the airport police have kept. Will you go through these, check the dates when diamonds consigned to English firms have failed to reach their destina-

tion, and when they have actually been found on passengers or aircraft. Then check with the dates on which Mr Van der Lunn has come to London?'

After a long pause, Jameson said: 'Yes, sir.'

'Is this my job, too?' asked Klemm, almost gloomily.

'Yes.'

'Mind if I take an hour off first, sir? I can slip over and see my wife and the nippers,' said Klemm. He lived in Lambeth, across the Thames.

'An hour won't make any difference,' Roger agreed. 'Can you use an hour, Lieutenant?'

Jameson said: 'I have no one expecting me, sir. If I could have the use of a desk somewhere, and these reports, I could begin the comparison.'

'Fix a desk,' Roger said to Klemm.

The two men went out, taking the files, Jameson still looking doubtful, perhaps it would be more true to say that he was looking worried. Roger pulled a pad towards him and jotted down notes of what he had already done, and what he thought now needed doing. He spent longer at this than he expected. He double checked everything he had discovered at Soames's office, and kept thinking about the possibility that Nightingale had been murdered. There was the 'coincidence' of the two disappearances, too: it was almost impossible for him to believe that. It was curious that Jameson had been so emphatic about Van der Lunn being above suspicion, equally curious that he had not mentioned an obvious possibility – that Van der Lunn might have been kidnapped because of something he had discovered about the traffic in diamonds.

When Klemm and Jameson had finished the analysis, there should be a much clearer picture of the case, and they should be through by half past nine or ten, which gave Roger a couple of hours.

He knew what he ought to do: telephone for a car and a driver and go home – to Chelsea, ten minutes drive away, and spend an hour there. Janet would be happy to get supper for him, and he would be able to relax at home much better than he could here. Then he faced a fact which in its way

was unpalatable: he was losing the ability to relax anywhere. That tied up with his objection to the way Gorlay had talked, and later to Hardy's manner. He was too tense. He did not know of any special reason for it, but there must be one. It was worth looking for. He felt compelled to stay close to his desk in case reports arrived, and yet he knew that such reports would reach him almost as quickly if he were home.

He tried to convince himself that a kind of sixth sense was working in him, and that he knew he ought to stay at the Yard, but emotionally he rejected this.

He looked through the reports in his briefcase, the ones which had been on his desk, and tried to convince himself that these must be dealt with tonight. As he looked through them, he admitted to himself that all could have waited.

He could go across to the pub in Cannon Row, and get dinner or a snack, but it would mean talking and drinking with others from the Yard, and he did not feel like it. He sent for a messenger to get him coffee and sandwiches, and was waiting for the elderly constable to come back with these, when his telephone bell rang.

'Mr Pendleton of South-West Division would like a word with you,' said the operator.

Pendleton was an old acquaintance, one who would not ring through as late as this for the sake of a chat.

'Put him through,' Roger said.

A moment later, the Divisional Superintendent spoke in a voice which had a slightly north country inflection.

'Hallo, Handsome. I think I might have some news for you.' Somehow Roger almost expected him to say 'for thee'. 'I've just had the circular and the photograph of the man Lewis. I think I can tell you where he is.'

# 6

# *RAID*

DARKNESS WAS settling gauntly over London as the police moved on the hotel where the missing man might be. It was just after eight o'clock. Roger was in the Divisional Superintendent's car, being driven by a middle-aged officer who seemed to drive by instinct, knowing every corner, every twist in the long main road, every traffic light, and divining the intention of other drivers. Three more police cars were converging on the hotel, which faced Clapham Common, a broad stretch of parkland on the far side of the river from Roger's home yet within a stone's throw of it. As the car turned into the road which overlooked the common, a couple showed up in the headlights, squirming on the grass beneath a tree, oblivious of the rest of the world, or else not caring.

'One of these days we're going to have to clean up the parks,' Pendleton remarked sourly.

'How far away is this place?' asked Roger.

'The man with the one-track mind. Just round the next corner,' Pendleton answered. 'Queer thing, coincidence. If our regular police surgeon hadn't been on holiday, we wouldn't have used Dr Abbott. If we hadn't used Abbott we wouldn't have recognized this chap when he went to see him as a patient.' Roger had already heard the story, once, but Pendleton was always inclined to be garrulous, partly to make sure that he rammed his point right home. 'And if Abbott hadn't come round to the station tonight and seen the photograph, we'd still be in the dark. Funny thing, coincidence,' he added prosily.

There were stranger ones . . .

A board was fastened to the wall surrounding a corner house, reading: *Common View Hotel;* that was the place.

The stone wall was high and looked thick. Shrubs and trees showed behind it, hiding much of the hotel building itself, but Roger could see a grey slate roof, the chimneys, the top windows There were two drive gates, and a small circular drive with a shrubbery in the middle. This house was like hundreds which faced parks and commons in the London area. A light shone at the porch, and as the car moved slowly past a light was switched on over the name board, showing it up very brightly. A youth on a bicycle came out, whistling. A second police-car passed, coming from the other direction; Jameson and Klemm were in this, Klemm driving. The raid had been laid on by Pendleton, and Roger resisted a temptation to ask questions; the Superintendent would get round to everything in good time.

Three houses along there was a narrow road, and another police-car was parked in it.

'That's covering the back. We've got one on the far corner, and the one with the coloured chap will wait across the road near the common,' Pendleton explained. 'Not exactly expecting trouble, are you?'

'I don't know what to expect.'

'Well, we're ready for anything,' Pendleton said confidently. 'We'll go in now. Okay?'

'Yes.'

'Impatient so-and so,' said Pendleton. They were back on the road overlooking the common, and turned into the hotel driveway. Lights showed upstairs and downstairs. A man sat reading an evening paper close to a window with a standard lamp by his chair, and the scene of a small private hotel could hardly have been more normal. Yet the place had a dilapidated look. As the car pulled up just past the front door, Roger saw an old garden umbrella and a child's push-chair in the porch. He got out one side, Pendleton the other, and they entered the wide porch together. Insects were humming and darting about the lamp's cheap, tinny shade. As they opened the door, a bell clanged loudly, obviously in warning to whoever was in charge. The hall was wide, there was an old fashioned hat-and-coat stand, a shabby imitation Persian carpet, doors which needed repainting, walls which

had been distempered a long time ago. A flight of stairs led off to the right, a narrow passage to the left and a door marked '*Private*'.

Nothing happened.

Pendleton looked round and saw a handbell; he picked it up and rang it heartily, and the resulting noise was deafening. As it faded, Roger thought he heard a thump upstairs. Already a warning was flashing in his mind, but Pendleton seemed to take all this for granted.

No one appeared.

'Time we took a look round,' Roger said.

'Okay, okay,' Pendleton agreed.

He broke off when the door marked '*Private*' opened and a tall, lean man appeared, with a kitchen apron round his waist. He had a scared, bird like look, which may have been partly due to the thick lenses of his glasses. At the same time, a woman appeared on the stairs, youngish, plumpish, with very full calves and very slim ankles. Her dark hair was a frizzy mop against the light on the half-landing above her.

'Good evening,' said the man.

'Can I help you?' asked the woman.

Roger had an impression that she was scared, too, and he was quite sure of one thing: she was breathing hard, as if she had been hurrying. Obviously, there might be a dozen innocent reasons. He spoke to her, as Pendleton spoke to the man.

'We are police-officers.'

'Police!' the man gasped.

'Police,' whispered the woman.

'I believe you have a Mr Lewis staying here,' said Pendleton. 'We'd like to see him, please.'

'Lewis?'

'No one named Lewis is here.'

'No one,' echoed the man.

'You've made a mistake,' declared the woman.

She was almost gasping for breath, and could not prevent herself from glancing upwards when there was another thud on the ceiling. Roger no longer doubted that someone up there was in a hurry. The man with the thick glasses was

stretching out one hand, as if to detain Pendleton. The woman said:

'I really don't know what—'

Roger pushed past her and ran up the stairs. As he reached the half-landing he saw the back of a man who was standing in a doorway, and called out to him: 'Stop there!' The man moved farther into the room clumsily, and back-kicked the door. It swung to, in Roger's face. He twisted round and put his shoulder to it, and took the impact without any pain. Someone was leaning or pressing against the other side He shouted down to Pendleton. 'Watch all the windows!' One or two people were trying to close the door on him, but he had little trouble in keeping it ajar.

A woman inside the room cried. 'Mind his head!'

Roger kept his right foot against the door to make sure they could not slam it, then drew back and threw his full weight against it. The door sagged inwards, and was stopped by a chair lodged under the handle. The woman cried out in despair:

'I can't keep them out!'

Someone came running up the stairs; it was Pendleton's driver, big and burly and middle-aged He took in the situation at a glance, called: 'Wait for me,' and lumbered up, getting into a position from which he could hurl his additional weight.

The woman in the room screamed: 'David, be careful!'

Roger and the driver thrust hard against the door at the same time; there was a crack of splintering wood. The door opened wider, a broken chair fell to one side, and a woman was staggering backwards, visible only in the half-light of the evening. She neared the window where a man was climbing out in a peculiar way. As Roger steadied himself in the middle of the room, a bedroom, a man called from the grounds:

'Stay there!'

Another man, Jameson, called out as if in fear:

'Don't let him fall!'

Roger saw the woman thrust herself between him and the window, still trying to keep him away from 'David'; then

saw that the man at the window was holding another man's wrists, and this second man was dangling out of the window. Roger took the woman by the shoulders, gripped, and thrust her to one side. She swayed out of his sight, and he forgot her. The man called David was obviously trying to lower the other to the ground. Roger rushed forward and leaned out, gripping the wrists of the dangling man. David struck at him ineffectually. All at once the man's full weight fell on to Roger's right arm, as David let go. Instinctively, Roger tightened his grip.

It had all happened so quickly there was hardly time to realize the danger. The weight of the man dragged Roger forward, and as the window ledge came only halfway up his thighs, his feet almost left the floor. His heart gave one great convulsive beat. *Let go or fall out* rang like an ultimatum in his mind, but he was not really conscious of it. He saw the bushes, and a concrete path immediately below. He saw men weaving and dodging about, torches shining up into his face with little bright blinding orbs. He heard a car engine roar and saw headlights blaze, but neither mattered. The weight got too much, and the man he was trying to save slipped. Desperately, Roger grabbed at him, and in an awful moment, felt himself topple out. Then suddenly a powerful arm encircled his waist and held him firm.

Afterwards, Roger realized that the danger had lasted only for a few seconds, but at the time it seemed like minutes. He thought vaguely of the things he had heard: the woman's 'Mind his head,' and Jameson's 'Don't let him fall.' Then he saw a crumpled figure on the concrete, and Jameson bending over it, dark head quite unmistakable. Others gathered round the huddled figure, while two men stood staring up.

In the room with Roger was a tall, lanky man, the woman, and two detectives.

Down below, a man said to Jameson: 'Is he all right?'

Jameson didn't answer, and Roger turned back into the room. The man, 'David', stood in a corner, shoulders drooping, eyes despairing. The woman sat on the side of a double bed, her face buried in her hands, and a detective stood over

her. Yet Roger had a feeling that he was absolutely on his own, that no one else was even near. His head was swimming. That annoyed him, for nothing had happened, he hadn't been hurt. His heart was still thumping like a trip hammer and sweat had broken out all over his body; it was like being in a steam-bath.

He moved slowly, towards the bed, glad to sit on the edge, opposite the woman. He thought she was crying; certainly her shoulders were heaving. He fumbled for his handkerchief and wiped the sweat off his forehead, and then realized that his mouth was parched and had a curious, almost bitter taste. He saw a wash-hand basin in one corner, made the effort, and went towards it. His legs were like lead. He let the cold tap run, rinsed his face, filled a tooth-glass with the water, and sipped; it was tepid. He drank a little more, then put the glass back. His hand was quite steady.

He could see everything clearly now, and felt much better. He began to think, too. The man in a heap on the concrete ground outside the window might be seriously hurt, might be Lewis *alias* Van der Lunn. He wanted to find out. He wanted to question the man and the woman here. He wanted to know what had been going on.

'David' had a nasty scratch on his chin and a speckle of blood at his lips and nose, thin grey hair like a golliwog's, eyes screwed up. He was looking towards the woman, and as if oblivious even of the men who were watching him, he took a step towards her.

'Don't cry, Beth. Don't cry.' When she didn't answer, but stayed there with her shoulders heaving and her face buried in her hands, he swung round on the man on his right and shouted: 'Don't hurt her. Understand – let her alone. It wasn't her fault, she wanted to stop me. You can't do anything to her!'

Roger moved forward.

'I should think we could get her at least five years in prison,' he said roughly. It was difficult to get the words out because he was still not quite himself, but they came clearly enough and with a significance that the man could not fail to see.

'*What?*'

'You heard me,' Roger said.

'But it wasn't her fault I swear it wasn't! She didn't know anything about it until yesterday. She tried to make me stop. Can't you understand?'

'I know that unless you can prove what you say she'll look as guilty as you,' Roger said. One part of his mind was waiting for news of the man who had fallen out of the window, the other concentrated on this tall, almost hysterical individual. 'Do you really want to help her?'

'You bloody fool, of course I do!'

'There's just one way. Tell us the whole story now: what you've been doing, what started it, why you kept that man here, why you tried to escape from the house?' Roger, suddenly himself again, nodded to the man holding the prisoner's left arm. 'Let him go. Do you write shorthand?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Take down what this man says,' ordered Roger. 'My questions and his answers.'

So it began, Roger's words quietly authoritative above the sound of the shrill tones of the prisoner, the woman's sobbing. From outside came the babel of men's voices, footsteps, the noise of cars coming and going; then suddenly the urgent ringing of a bell, telling Roger that an ambulance had just arrived It could only be for the man he had allowed to slip from his grasp.

If that man died, whose fault would it be?

# 7

## *SICK UNTO DEATH*

As the man, David, talked he kept glancing across at the woman, Beth, and occasionally twisted his long, scraggy neck round, as if as preoccupied as Roger about what was going on outside. The noises had tailed off but soon another

car engine started; almost certainly the ambulance. Roger's questions were brisk and to the point, aimed at getting the story out of the man, David, quickly, and he was sure of one thing: emotionally upset with the knowledge of failure and worry for his wife, this David was more likely to talk freely now than at any time.

His name was David Arthur Bradshaw.

Beth was Elizabeth, his wife.

The man who had tried to head Roger and Pendleton off downstairs was his brother, Joshua Bradshaw; and the other, plump young woman was Joshua's wife, Rebecca.

The basic facts were that Joshua and Rebecca owned the hotel, and Beth lived here most of the time, helping her relations. David was a steward employed by the British Overseas Airways Corporation.

He swore that he did not know any details about the man whom he had lowered through the window.

*'If you hadn't come I'd have stopped him from falling ...'*

Roger let that pass, and asked:

'Who is the man?'

'All I know is his name's Lewis,' David Bradshaw went on tensely. 'Listen, I I was forced into it. Blackmailed, I –' He moistened his lips, and then words poured out of him. 'You'll find out sooner or later: you may as well know now. I've smuggled a few bags of diamonds in, the people I've worked for threatened to report me if I didn't do what they ordered. I *had* to.'

He had been given tablets to mix in a drink for Lewis soon after the aircraft had left Johannesburg, he said. He tried to pretend that he believed they had been to help the man, but at heart he obviously believed these tablets, and others he had given the man during the flight, had caused his sickness.

*'He just sat in his seat all the time, looking as if he was in a coma. He didn't get out at Cairo or Nairobi, just sat there, I tell you ...'*

Someone, he swore he didn't know the man, had come to meet Lewis at London Airport. Bradshaw said he had seen nothing more of Lewis until, on the same evening, another

strange man had brought Lewis to the hotel. This man had told Bradshaw to keep him there until given further instructions.

Next came a garbled story of family dissension: Joshua and Rebecca had wanted to send for the police, David had confessed to them, Beth had pleaded to give him another chance. Fear in case Lewis should die had made Rebecca send for a doctor without David knowing.

It was a pathetic story in its way, with a ring of conviction about it.

Only on one thing was David Bradshaw absolutely adamant: he said he did not know the names of the people he worked for, that the individuals who gave him the diamonds to smuggle were different each time, that he had never before seen the man who had brought Lewis to the hotel, and there was nothing at all he could do to help the police to trace him.

In David Bradshaw, even now that he had recovered from the worst shock, there was deep and burning fear. He would not admit to it, but it seemed to show in his eyes and make his lips twitch and his voice unsteady. It passed itself on to his wife, who had recovered from her paroxysm of crying and sat on the bed, dry-eyed, staring, a handsome woman if one could forget the pale traces of her tears and the redness of her eyes.

Roger put question after question, until he felt sure he had learned all they could or would tell him now. As soon as he stopped the questions, there was a movement at the door, and Pendleton came in.

'I've been questioning the couple downstairs,' the Divisional man announced. 'Like to come down and compare the stories, Superintendent?'

'I've told you the truth,' muttered David Bradshaw. 'Listen to me, can't you? It's not my wife's fault, she didn't know what I was doing. She wanted me to come to the police. For God's sake, don't blame her.'

'We'll need to see both of you at New Scotland Yard,' Roger said formally. 'We'll send you there, and if we can let your wife go after you've both signed your statements, we

will. It won't be up to me.' It could be, of course, but there was no reason to say so. 'Take them down to a car,' he instructed the man who had made a record of questions and answers. He stood aside for them to pass, Beth with her head raised now in a kind of defiance, David with his head hanging, his big hands clenching and unclenching. As they were taken down the stairs, Roger asked Pendleton:

'How much of that did you hear?'

'Most of it.'

'Do the others corroborate this chap?'

'Pretty well,' said Pendleton. 'We know what the situation is here all right. As far as I can judge no one but David Bradshaw had any idea of what was going on until Lewis was dumped into the hotel. Lot to think about over that, haven't you?'

Roger said: 'Yes.' He made himself ask: 'How is Lewis?'

'Not so good,' Pendleton answered. 'He's on his way to New Westminster Hospital. You should get a report from there soon.' Pendleton looked round the rather dingy bedroom, with the blue uniform of a BOAC steward on a hanger behind the door, a BOAC cap, a battered suitcase with the BOAC label on it. The square of brown carpet was threadbare, two easy-chairs needed re-covering, there was a look of dilapidation and neglect everywhere. 'Better have a look round here, and then check the rest of the hotel. Like us to look after it, or would you rather do it with your own eagle-eye?'

'Let me have a report first thing in the morning,' Roger said. He managed to grin at Pendleton's obvious satisfaction. 'Good job you pinned that picture up early, Pen. God knows what might have happened if Lewis had stayed there another night.' He paused. 'Is it Van der Lunn?'

'Your dark-skinned pal thinks so,' Pendleton answered. 'He's gone over to the hospital. I got the impression that he didn't really believe what he'd seen with his own eyes – he didn't want to believe it was the man you're after.'

'I'll go and talk to him,' Roger said.

Downstairs, Joshua and Rebecca Bradshaw were still answering questions, the woman promising that they would

do everything they could to help, swearing that they hadn't intended to break the law, that the hotel was absolutely respectable. Roger glanced at the Visitors' Register, and saw that it seemed to be kept in good order. He felt quite sure of one thing: if the hotel was run for illegal purposes, Pendleton and the divisional detectives would find out.

Roger went outside. The night seemed cooler and clearer now with starlight, and the glow from all the street lamps, the windows of the hotel and nearby houses, all seemed much brighter. Klemm was waiting for him. Roger shook hands with Pendleton and got in beside Klemm, who was at the wheel of the police-car.

'What happened to our driver?' asked Roger.

'Pendleton sent him off with Jameson.'

'Right. Let's go and see how things are at the hospital,' Roger said. He sat back for a few moments as Klemm swung the car into the side-road, then took a road across the common, towards Battersea and the Thames. Klemm obviously sensed that this was no time to ask questions, and drove with a casual skill which sometimes seemed almost to be negligent, but in fact never was.

They crossed the Thames at Battersea Bridge, beneath smoke belching out of the four great stacks of the power station, and with the lights of the bridges and the Embankment reflecting like newborn stars in the smooth surface of the river. They turned off the Embankment towards the new hospital, a mammoth place of glass and ferro-concrete, more like a hotel to look at than a hospital. The forecourt outside was small, but beyond it, down a slope, was the underground car park, the entrance a huge slit like an open mouth ready to devour all cars which ventured near. They pulled up outside, and Klemm asked:

'Want me to come in?'

'No,' said Roger. 'I don't think there's anything else for you tonight. Make out your report for the morning. It needn't be too detailed, just general. We'll go over everything then.'

'Thanks,' said Klemm. 'Er—'

'Yes?'

'Won't be working too late, sir, will you?'

Roger frowned. 'I'll survive. Take the car. I'll get one from the Yard when I'm ready.' He nodded to Klemm, and walked up the steps to the main hall of the hospital, where first the doorman, then the porter seemed like pale relics from the old world in this new one of glass and brittle silence. Only two nurses, smart in their uniforms, seemed to fit in here. But the men were helpful, and obviously regarded him with the awe that the police seemed to inspire in so many people. They had been expecting an officer from the Yard, and Roger was led by another porter along the wide, pale walled corridors, past the closed doors which hid life's secrets, to a silent lift, and eventually to a floor marked '*Private Wards*'. Red lights showed over some of the lintels. A little convoy of white-clad people, two male nurses, two female nurses, a man in a white smock, and an attendant came along, the attendant pushing a trolley on which a man lay at full length, unconscious. It wasn't Lewis *alias* Van der Lunn. Light shone from a partly-open door marked 'Sister', and the boy tapped at it.

A youthful, starched looking woman looked up from a desk placed behind the door.

'Yes?'

'Superintendent West from New Scotland Yard, Sister.'

The woman's aloof expression changed. She stood up and smiled herself into being human, dismissed the boy, and said to Roger:

'I've heard so much about you, Superintendent.'

'Mustn't believe all you hear, good or bad,' said Roger almost mechanically. 'Is Lieutenant Jameson here?'

'We have an empty ward, so he's waiting in there. Would you like some coffee?'

'Yes, please. And if you could find a sandwich I'd appreciate it.'

'So you missed your evening meal, too,' the Sister said. 'I'll see what I can do.' Tall and precise of movement, she led the way along the passage which was empty and silent now. There were lights over some of the doors, and she opened one and stood aside.

Jameson sprang to his feet.

'Hallo,' Roger said. 'It looks as if we've found a home from home. Sit down.' He waved to the chair, then sat on the edge of the single bed in this small, square antiseptic room, with its pale green walls and its metal bedstead and its spindly table. He looked across at Jameson, and saw that the man's face was drawn, that he really seemed worried and anxious. 'How is he?' Roger asked.

Jameson said very slowly: 'He is sick unto death, Mr West.'

'Is he really as bad as that?'

'Yes, sir. It appears that he has been under morphine for nearly five days, and that the doses have been very large. Also, when he fell from the window, he injured the back of his head rather seriously, and they are operating on him for that injury now. Have no doubt, he is sick unto death.'

If he died, whose fault would it be?

'And he is Van der Lunn?' Roger made himself ask.

'Yes,' answered Jameson bleakly. 'I cannot understand it. I cannot believe that he would associate himself with this smuggling, but—' He shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of resignation which made him seem very young. 'It will be some time before he can talk, even if he lives to talk at all.' He stood up and began to walk about the room. 'Did you get any information from the people at the hotel?'

Roger began to tell him, and was interrupted by a tap at the door. A dark-skinned nurse came in, shiny-checked and attractive in her blue frock and white sash and head scarf, carrying a tray with sandwiches and a pot of coffee. She smiled brightly at Jameson, who had obviously seen her before. Two black, one white, Roger thought a little absurdly. The girl had a pleasant, soft toned voice, and seemed a little shy. Or coy? As she went out, she cast a quick look over her shoulder at Jameson, not at Roger.

Roger said: 'A conquest.'

'She is very nice.'

'Yes.'

'She comes from Kingston, Jamaica,' Jameson volunteered, 'and she has been in England for two years. She likes it very

much.' He seemed to brood for a few moments, and then went on: 'Will you tell me the rest, please? ... And please allow me to pour out.'

Roger picked up a sandwich.

'When do you expect to hear from the operating theatre?'

'They told me that there might be some news by eleven o'clock, and it is now half past ten,' Jameson answered.

There was no news at eleven o'clock, by which time Roger's story was told, the sandwiches and coffee were gone. There was a sense of anticlimax in the period of waiting. Sick unto death, Jameson had said. Why had this affected him so much? It was almost as if there was a strong personal anxiety, apart from anxiety to do his job as thoroughly as he could. It was ludicrous to blame himself for allowing the man to slip.

Footsteps sounded outside, and Jameson sprang to his feet as the door opened, but it was the coloured nurse, here to collect the empty tray. She seemed more positively coy than she had been before. As she went out, Jameson looked at Roger, almost smiling, as if something had happened to help him relax.

'Mr West, I must wait here, but there is no need for you to stay.'

'We should have the news soon,' Roger said. 'The quicker we know whether we've a murder charge on our hands, the better.'

*Could* he have saved that man?

## 8

## *MURDER CHARGE?*

IT WAS after midnight.

Roger felt tired out, partly from reaction, partly because he had been up so early that morning. Now, the evening newspapers were spread out on the bed. The Jamaican nurse

had brought in another, smaller armchair, for Jameson. There were two messages, one from Pendleton to say that there were no diamonds at the hotel, one from the Yard to say that Elizabeth Bradshaw could be released if he, West, decided that was the thing to do. Roger wanted to know whether this would be a murder charge before he made up his mind.

Footsteps sounded again; this time Jameson sat still, but his body tensed.

The door opened, and the Sister and a grey-haired man in a white smock came in; probably the surgeon. He was rather plump, rather too red faced, a little like a bucolic young man whom some shock or insupportable burden had aged in a few short years. Now Jameson stood up, and Roger felt a quickening of his own anxiety. Why did surgeons and doctors often take so long in saying what they had to say? As the thought passed through his mind, he knew that it was unreasonable.

The Sister said: 'Mr McMurray, this is Superintendent West and Lieutenant Jameson. Mr McMurray has just come from the theatre after the operation.'

There were the usual formal pleasantries, during which Jameson was obviously drilling himself not to ask questions.

'Superintendent, as far as I can tell you, Mr Lewis has a good chance,' McMurray said. 'The operation itself has been successful, but his general condition could affect his recovery. I think it will be a matter of several days before we can say what will happen with any certainty.'

Thank God for that, Roger thought.

'But you are hopeful?' Jameson couldn't restrain himself.

'Yes, Mr Jameson.'

'I am very grateful,' Jameson said. 'Thank you very much, sir. When will it be possible for Mr Lewis to have visitors?'

'Certainly not for another two days, and it will be even longer before he can be questioned, no matter how important these questions may seem to you.' McMurray was quite definite, yet managed to make his pronouncement pleasantly. 'Will you want a man at the patient's bedside, Mr West?'

'Yes, sir.'

'You will arrange the necessary facilities, Sister, won't you?' McMurray nodded at the two detectives and went out, as if glad his duty was done. Jameson, obviously suffering from the anticlimax, kept moistening his lips. Roger saw how very pink his tongue was; it had a curious fascination.

The Sister said: 'There's a car waiting for you in the forecourt, I believe.'

'I'd like to use a telephone before we go,' Roger said.

He spoke to the night-duty superintendent at the Yard and arranged for a man to be at Lewis Van der Lunn's bedside. There was something else on the tip of his tongue, but he couldn't bring it to mind so he rang off.

Klemm had arranged for the car. Klemm was certainly anxious that he shouldn't overdo it. Did he give the impression that he was heavily overworked? He knew a lot of men at the Yard who had nearly cracked up, over the years. The approach of a nervous breakdown through overwork had been obvious to Roger and to others who worked with them, but had always come as a surprise to the sufferers themselves. Should he have a medical check-up? The idea that he might need one was surely an indication that he did. He tried to shrug the thought away as he sank back into the car, with Jameson by his side.

'Where can I drop you?' he asked.

'If you could stop at a bus stop—'

'Nonsense. Where do you live?'

'In Bloomsbury.'

'My place is nearer,' Roger said, and leaned forward to the driver. 'Drop me at Bell Street, and then take Lieutenant Jameson to his home.'

'Right, sir.'

'You're very good,' Jameson said. After a few minutes, he went on: 'I hope there will be an opportunity early tomorrow to discuss the inquiry together, Mr West. There are some aspects of it which I am sure would interest you and which I am sure you would find useful.'

Roger shifted back in his seat, studied the face which was so black, the eyes which shone brightly as street lamp after street lamp passed, and the full lips. Jameson was smiling,

but it wasn't really a smile, it was an indication of some kind of nervousness.

'Why are you so worried?' Roger asked. 'Why is Van der Lunn so important to you?'

After a long pause, Jameson answered: 'He is a very good man, a very progressive man. It would be a bad thing if he were to die. And he is an important man in the economy of my country. We need engineers and men of vision.'

Roger said drily: 'That may be half the reason.'

'Mr West—'

'It's all right,' Roger said, 'if you mustn't tell me, you mustn't. Forget it.'

They sat in silence for a few minutes, constraint upon them for the first time. The car turned into King's Road, and gathered speed; Bell Street, one of the turnings to the left, was looming up. They slowed down and took the turn. The bedroom of his house was in darkness, Roger saw, Janet and their two sons would probably be asleep – he must be careful not to waken them.

'Mr West,' Jameson said as the car stopped, 'I hope I have not caused any offence. I am a very troubled person. I am troubled because there seems to be some reason to believe that Mr Van der Lunn might be involved in this smuggling of diamonds, and, if he is, then it will have grave repercussions in my country. Already there is more than enough to preoccupy the Government, such a scandal as this could be—' He hesitated, and then went on: 'Disastrous, yes, disastrous.'

'We haven't any proof that he's involved yet,' Roger said. On the spur of the moment, he went on: 'Like to come in for a drink?'

'You are very kind, but I must return,' said Jameson. 'What time may I present myself at your office in the morning?'

'Is half past nine early enough?'

'I will be there at nine-thirty,' promised Jameson. 'Good-night, Mr West, and thank you.'

'*Thank you, thank you, thank you, 'ank you, 'ank you, you, you, you, you, you.*' The soft voice seemed to fade into the

distance, carried away by the purring of the engine of the police car. Roger wondered why he stood for a few seconds and stared after it, waiting until the red light turned the corner, and then vanished. The noise of the engine and the echoing of the voice were gone. Roger turned towards the front door of his house, passed it, and went along to the back; he preferred to go in that way, there was less risk of waking Janet. He reached the corner and saw a glow of light at the farthest window on the upper floor, that was Martin's room. He smiled to himself, a little grimly. It was nearly one o'clock. Martin would have a full day at his college of art tomorrow, and yet he was up there, painting or sketching, oblivious of the time. Roger slipped his key into the keyhole, pushed the door open, and went in as the light flashed on.

In the doorway leading to the front of the house stood Martin, hand at the light switch, mouth open, eyes rounded. He was a powerful looking youth, with a crew-cut which gave his face a rather unadorned look, and his eyes a surprised expression.

Suddenly, he grinned.

'Hi, Dad!'

'Hallo, Scoop. Come down to raid the milk?'

'Just a sip.'

'Don't forget not to drink out of the bottle,' Roger said, and they both laughed on a subdued note. 'How's your mother?'

'Well, I haven't seen much of her, really. She had a headache and went to bed early. She's all right, I think. She left some supper, and said if I was up when you came back I was to tell you you could heat it up, or have it cold, but you must have something if you haven't had dinner.'

Roger grinned.

'She guessed right again! What is it?' He moved to the gas-stove, and found a plate laden with steak-and-kidney pie and vegetables, on a saucepan half-filled with water. 'Cold, I think,' he said. 'Funny thing, your mother's is the only steak pie I can ever enjoy cold. Put the kettle on for a cup of coffee, will you? Then get off to bed, or you'll be a wreck in the morning.'

'*I'll* be a wreck!' Martin retorted.

Roger asked sharply: 'What do you mean by that?'

'Well ' Martin-called-Scoop was momentarily ill-at-ease, but soon he answered with a kind of earnest frankness which was all his own, and could be exasperating or commendable according to the parental mood. He took the electric kettle to the sink as he went on: 'You have been looking a bit under the weather lately, Dad. Mum says that if you don't ease off a bit you'll crack up.' He turned the tap and water spurted, but he twisted his head round to look at Roger. 'Do you have to work so hard?'

Roger grunted, and then said urgently: 'Mind that kettle!' It was already brimming full of water and more was pouring out of the spout. Scoop snatched it from the tap and water splashed on to the tiled floor, and over his own thick, white socks; he wore no shoes.

'Sorry, Dad!'

Roger said: 'Never be a copper. Your life is not your own. I took your mother out to lunch today, and found the Assistant Commissioner on my back as soon as I reached the office.' He put the plate of food on the kitchen table, and pulled up a kitchen-chair As he began to eat, he reflected that Martin-called-Scoop and-once-called-Scoopy was nearly twenty-one, that in many ways he was older than his age, more mature, more balanced in judgement than many men five or six years older.

The cold steak pie had that appetizing flavour which Janet managed to give to her cooking; he enjoyed it. Martin brought a cup of coffee to the table, and a mug of milk for himself. He sat down.

'What kind of a day has it been, Dad?'

'Tricky and highly confidential,' said Roger.

'So I shut my big mouth,' Martin said. 'Sorry I asked.'

From another boy, that might have sounded impudent if not insolent, but from him it was a completely honest reaction.

'Half of it's a diamond-smuggling job,' Roger said.

'Diamond smuggling,' Martin echoed, and sipped. 'Sounds pretty romantic.'

'If you'd seen what I've seen tonight you would think it was pretty sordid.'

'Smuggling,' repeated Martin. 'There's always something not quite criminal to me about that - unless the diamonds were stolen first.'

'They were stolen,' Roger said. 'First they were consigned to different diamond merchants and industrial diamond users round the world. You know what fragments of diamonds are used for, don't you?'

'Cutting tools - for cutting metal, and drills, and—'

'Good enough,' Roger interrupted. 'Some left South Africa but didn't reach the consignee – they were stolen *en route*.' That much he could safely say. 'South African police are sure they all left the country intact. There's a tight internal control over diamonds there,' added Roger.

'I know.'

'Good. Diamonds are sold through one group only, the quantity put on the market in any one year is strictly restricted, to help keep up the price. Here and there, fresh diamond-fields are discovered, and here and there supplies of diamonds which were lawfully mined are sold to dealers who try to smuggle them out whenever there's a sellers' market. So there has to be a tight control.'

Martin grinned. 'It's certainly a good job I'm not a copper. I'd be inclined to wink at anyone beating the monopoly and if the chaps got away, say good luck to 'em.'

'There's a man in hospital tonight, who might recover or who might die.'

'Because of the diamond thefts?'

'Yes.'

After a pause, Martin said: 'Oh, well, I'm glad I'm not a policeman.' There was another pause. 'Were you there when he got hurt?'

In an unguarded moment, and largely because he was tired, Roger said:

'I was damned lucky not to break my own neck.'

He was startled as well as surprised by his son's reaction. It wasn't just surprise in itself, it went much deeper. It conveyed a sense of alarm and of anxiety which reminded

Roger of Jamieson's manner. Quite suddenly, Martin became a small boy again, a scared small boy because he had suddenly seen something which frightened him and which he didn't understand.

'Oh, forget it, it wasn't as bad as that,' Roger said. 'It's all in the day's work.'

'Yes,' Martin said, soberly. 'That's what Mum realizes. She's afraid, Dad. She told me not to tell you what she said, but – well, I think I ought to. I didn't actually promise' Twenty one, fifteen, eleven, he was all three ages in one single moment. 'She said that she worries enough about you at normal times, but she doesn't think you're right on top at the moment. She says she knows that you have to be absolutely on top of yourself if you're to cope with sudden emergencies. I tell you, she's afraid, Dad. She's frightened you might have to investigate some crime against violent criminals, and and well, that your luck won't last for ever.'

Roger sat back, aghast.

He was silent for so long that Martin began again, miserably:

'Oh, I'm a fool. I shouldn't have told you. I suppose you'll say that she's a bit worried because of her time of life, or something; it's always difficult at this change period, or whatever it is. But honestly, Dad, she's really nervous in case something happens to you' He looked straight into Roger's eyes, and then added very slowly and deliberately, so that there could be no doubt that he meant exactly what he said. 'I am, too. As a matter of fact I was talking about it to Richard only last week. Of course, *he* said I was dreaming it up, that you're right on the ball as always, but are you, Dad? Do you really feel you are?'

# 9

# *MOMENT OF TRUTH*

ROGER STARED into his son's clear, rounded, apprehensive eyes Scoop obviously wondered whether he had said too much, and his, Roger's, first reaction was of anger that the boy should talk to him so. He almost held his breath He must not show anger, must not show his feelings; he must be quite rational and unemotional about this. And Scoop wasn't a boy, remember. He was an intelligent young man.

'Dad,' Scoop said, 'I'm sorry. I know I shouldn't have said that.'

'Didn't you mean what you said?' asked Roger, stiffly.

'Well, yes, but well, I know I may not know what I'm talking about.'

A warmth of affection, in fact, of love, crept over Roger and drove all thought and memory of anger away. He smiled, obviously much more relaxed, pushed his chair back, and said:

'Haven't we always had an understanding that each can say whatever he thinks, provided he finds a way of saying it nicely?' When his son gave a barely perceptible nod, Roger went on: 'So you said what you thought, and I'm glad that you did. Want an honest answer?'

'Well well, if you feel like talking about it, yes.'

'The answer is that I don't really know,' Roger told him. 'I don't feel right on top of myself all the time. Occasionally I seem to get more tired than I used to, but it's only now and again, and it soon passes. I have to put a bit more effort into everything I have to do, whereas I used to do it without thinking. Maybe the new way is better. I'll soon be fifty, you know.' When Scoop nodded, Roger spoke more briskly, almost as if he was changing the subject: 'Do you think your mother is seriously worried?'

'Well, yes, sometimes.'

'Such as?'

'Well, whenever a policeman gets injured, or run down by a car, or attacked by crooks, the newspapers always play it up. When Mum reads the story she's always more thoughtful than she used to be: preoccupied, I suppose. She doesn't say much, but now and again she'll throw the paper aside, and mutter something like "I know he'll overdo it sooner or later." That kind of thing, if you know what I mean.' Suddenly, Scoop gave his broad grin, showing fine white teeth with one slightly grey, the nerve of which had been 'killed' while boxing. 'After all, Dad, you do stick your neck out, don't you? Fish and I have a whopping great file of press-cuttings about you upstairs, and were going through them the other day. We formed a mutual "Admire Handsome West" Fan Club, and decided you ought to have had the George Medal at least three times.'

'You must show me this file of cuttings one day,' Roger said drily. 'Now it's time for bed, and I'm tired out. Good Lord! It's nearly two o'clock.'

Upstairs, in the front bedroom with the lamplight breaking the darkness, and a glow spreading over Janet's hair and face, Roger moved very quietly, and Janet did not stir. He was not long getting into bed. She turned over, her back towards him. He lay on his side for a few minutes, physically snug and warm, the tensions and the tiredness oozing out of his body. He believed he would drop off in a few minutes. That was one of the things which he could rely on unless he had some really deep preoccupation, and tonight there should be none – thank God the man hadn't died. He had done everything he could. He had found Lewis Van der Lunn, and that would please Hardy as well as South Africa House. Queer business, though – and Jameson was really worried. Pity if he started thinking about Jameson now. It was amazing how subconscious thoughts could keep one awake. No need to worry, though, he was almost asleep, dropping off, dropping off, he would get more sleep than those poor devils at the hotel, more than David Bradshaw, more than his Beth.

Beth Bradshaw!

On that instant, Roger was fully awake, all thought of sleep gone. He had promised to ring the Yard and say whether David's wife need be detained all night. He had decided to let her go if Van der Lunn survived, and had actually talked to the Yard and forgotten the message about Elizabeth Bradshaw. He could picture her sitting on the edge of the bed, her face in her hands, her shoulders shaking as she sobbed. Well, it was her husband's fault, not his; it wasn't his responsibility.

But it was.

He got out of bed, very cautiously, and Janet stirred; he half expected her to speak. He went out of the room, leaving the door ajar, and groped his way down the stairs, not putting on a light until he reached the hall. The telephone was near the kitchen and living-room doors. He was able to shut one door before he dialled the Yard. He was answered at once but it was some time before Sharp, the superintendent-in-charge, came on the line.

'Hallo, Handsome, not in bed yet?'

'Just turning in,' said Roger. 'As Lewis is alive, I don't think we need hold Elizabeth Bradshaw. Tell her we'll want to question her again in the morning, will you, and let her go. You can send her back to the hotel.'

'Yes. Glad you called,' Sharp said. 'Bradshaw's pacing up and down in his cell like a madman, because he doesn't know what's happening to his wife. I'll fix it.'

'Thanks,' said Roger.

He smiled with relief as he replaced the receiver, went upstairs in the dark again, heard Janet's deep breathing and was relieved that she hadn't been disturbed. He slid into bed, turned over, and was asleep in a few minutes.

* * *

It was half past eight when Roger woke. He lay on his own, vaguely realizing that Janet was not in bed, uneasily aware that it must be late, staring at the sky which he could see through a corner of the window, ears strained to catch sounds from downstairs. Suddenly he heard Richard's voice:

'Bye, Mum. I must be off.'

'Be careful with that car!'

'I'll be careful,' Richard said with a laugh in his voice. 'It's the other chaps you have to worry about. Say goodbye and hallo to Dad, or is it the other way round?' He went out the back way, and Roger got out of bed, yawned and stretched, heard the roar of Richard's small, very old MG, and crossed to the window. Richard was waving to Janet, who was at the front door, as the car moved on to the road. Richard was taller, leaner, and in some ways more alert-looking than Martin. Out of the corner of his eye he must have seen Roger at the window, for he waved and shouted:

'Hi, Dad!'

Roger waved back, Richard drove out of sight a little too fast and Roger went to the head of the stairs as Janet turned away from the front door. This morning of all mornings he had to be absolutely himself, to make Janet feel that he was completely self confident and good-humoured. She was quite tall for a woman. Her thick, dark hair was flecked with grey, her eyes had a clarity that he had always loved; she was a nice-looking woman by any standards.

'Couldn't spare a cuppa, could you?' Roger asked. 'Shall I come down?'

'I've got a kettle on, I'll bring a pot of tea up,' Janet said. 'What time do you have to leave?'

'An hour ago.'

Janet laughed. 'Don't be a fool. Seriously.'

'Nine fifteen,' Roger answered, although to reach the Yard by nine-thirty, when he had promised to see Jameson, he should leave by nine o'clock sharp. Some kind of concession was obviously needed, so he made it cheerfully.

'I suppose it could be worse,' Janet conceded.

She brought up tea, which he sipped between moments of shaving, washing, and dressing. He felt much brisker than he had for some time, although whenever he thought of the conversation with Martin he felt rueful. Janet showed no sign that she realized this; in fact, Janet had slept soundly and was looking and feeling at her best. If she had any particular anxieties she hid them well, and Roger found himself

wondering whether Martin had exaggerated; but somehow he did not think so. He went downstairs to bacon, eggs, sausages, tomatoes, and fried bread, and at sight of the piled-up dish, he laughed.

'Did someone tell you I'm starving myself?'

'Something tells me that you're going to be very busy today, and that probably means a sandwich and a cup of coffee for lunch. How did the case go, darling?'

'*Comme ci, comme ça,*' Roger replied. 'And if the radio or the evening newspapers try to pretend I was a hero last night, don't believe them.'

On the instant, alarm flared up in Janet's eyes, and he knew that Martin had been right, that fear for him was on top of Janet's mind. He wanted to eat up and be off, but if she showed any sign of wanting to talk, of needing reassurance, he would have to stay. For a few moments she stared at him, and he pretended that he didn't know what was in her mind. Then he gave her a hug and a quick kiss, and said:

'With a bit of luck I'll be home early tonight.'

Janet made no comment, and seemed to have recovered. He knew that she hadn't, of course. That she had simply repressed her feelings so as not to delay him. She made coffee, and he tucked into the breakfast, enjoying every mouthful.

It was half past nine before he left home. He decided to go along the Embankment to Westminster, and at the approach to Albert Bridge, found himself crawling in a long line, mostly of stinking diesel trucks, heading in the same direction. There ought to be a law against diesel fumes. The Embankment seemed to be getting noisier and busier every day. All the traffic lights were against him, and by the time he swung across Parliament Square and then turned on to the Embankment and into the Yard, he was as bad tempered as at the end of a tough day. He saw no parking-place; everyone was parked in the courtyard this morning.

A man came up. It was ferrety-looking Detective-Sergeant Gorlay, still bent on pleasing him.

'Like me to park it for you, sir?'

'Er — yes. Yes, thanks.' Roger got out. 'Leave the keys at the front desk.' He trotted up the stone steps towards the

front entrance, mollified by Gorlay's manner: blow hot, blow cold, that was the truth about his moods. He saw that it was five past ten, and for some reason was particularly sorry that he had kept Jameson waiting. Everyone else would know that it was unavoidable, but would the South African? He was nearly at his office door when another opened, and Klemm appeared, moving in a hurry.

Klemm pulled up with the suddenness and grace of a Spanish dancer.

'Oh, *here* you are' Before Roger could respond, he went on: 'Hardy's been looking for you all over the place. Will you go straight up the minute you get in?'

Roger said sharply 'One of these days you'll be caught saying "Hardy" instead of 'the Assistant Commissioner", and that won't do you any good.' He saw Klemm react almost resentfully 'Is Lieutenant Jameson here?'

'Yes. He's been waiting for at least half an hour.'

Roger nodded, and strode along to his own office, heard someone speaking, opened the door and saw Jameson sitting on the arm of an easy-chair, talking into the telephone and obviously concentrating on what he was saying Roger drew back. He let the door close, and went straight to see Hardy. As he walked down the stairs he warned himself that he must not show any resentment, whatever Hardy said.

He tapped at the secretary's door, but there was no answer. He went in, found the room empty, went across to Hardy's office, tapped, and heard Hardy say: 'See who that is, Rose.' The door opened, and the secretary said:

'It's Mr West.'

'Oh, Handsome.' Hardy got up from his desk and moved towards him. His secretary slipped past Roger, and he could have sworn that she winked at him. 'I hear you made a hero of yourself again last night.' Hardy placed a hand on Roger's shoulder for a moment, a rare demonstrative gesture 'If Van der Lunn had died, I think we'd have been in trouble. As it is, it looks as if we're in everybody's good books, which makes a nice change.' He motioned to a chair and Roger sat down with a feeling that this wasn't really happening to him. 'There are the two distinct problems,' went on Hardy.

'The disappearance of the packets of diamonds, and the kidnapping of Van der Lunn. We've obviously reason to suspect that they're connected, but can't be certain. The South African Ambassador is very anxious to find out. I gather from du Toit that you've impressed him as being open-minded, and able to see this problem without any kind of – er – emotional prejudice.'

Hardy paused.

Roger said almost ruefully: 'Du Toit must have bought an awful lot of butter.' He just stopped himself from adding: 'What's all this leading up to?'

'Butter or blarney, they're impressed, particularly because we've found Van der Lunn very quickly.'

'That was a mixture of luck and routine.'

'A hell of a lot of our work is,' remarked Hardy, 'but we don't have to tell du Toit. The point is, I want you to drop everything else and concentrate on finding out whether the kidnapping of Van der Lunn was connected with the diamonds, or with his visit to London about oil surveying. Before another negotiator is sent out from South Africa the authorities want to know the motive. No one says so, but there's obviously some fear that it might be politically inspired, and so far there's no way of telling. What I really want you to do,' added Hardy with a broad smile, 'is find out that this *isn't* political! If you can do that, the air will be cleared, and we'll have a lot of people off our backs. So you have *carte blanche*. Leave no stone unturned and all that. Use as many men as you need – within reason,' the Assistant Commissioner added with a dash of characteristic caution. 'How long will it take you to put someone else on to the other jobs you've got in hand?'

'Not long,' Roger answered. 'They can always have a word with me if they're pushed. Any special instructions?'

'This is a job you've got to play by ear,' said Hardy. 'Make sure your ear's tuned in properly.'

## 10

# *PLAYING BY EAR*

ROGER STRODE along the passages of the Yard as if new life had been breathed into him. That made itself evident by the length of his stride, the feeling that he could push aside everything that got in his way, the fact that a dozen aspects flashed into his mind, and he knew exactly what he wanted to do about every one of them. He pushed open the door of the office where Klemm worked with five other chief inspectors, to find Klemm there on his own, writing. He looked up.

'Tell Gorlay to come along to my office at noon, will you? And come yourself.' Roger let the door swing to behind him. 'Any bright ideas about men we could use on this job?' Before Klemm could say 'What part of the job?' Roger went on: 'We want a small team ready to work night and day on it until we find out the real reason for the attack on Van der Lunn. You, Jameson, Gorlay, a couple of DO's and another CI, one who won't get in your hair or mine.'

Klemm was grinning almost fiercely.

'McKay,' he said promptly. 'He's our best diamond man after Mr Butterworth. Knows Amsterdam inside out, knows more diamond thieves and diamond smugglers than the rest of us put together—rest of us CI's,' Klemm added as a hurried afterthought.

'Do you know if he's free?'

'He's tidying up the evidence on that Hatton Garden job. Then he was going to have a week's fishing.'

'The fish will bite a lot better next month,' said Roger. 'Brief him, will you? I'm going along to my office, then over to Cannon Row. Is Jameson with you?

'Patient as Job.'

Roger nodded, and went out: Klemm was already speaking on the telephone and the last words Roger heard as the

door closed were: '. . . see if McKay's there.' Roger's office was only a few doors along. He thrust the door open so suddenly that Jameson jumped up from a chair at the corner of the desk, and papers he was writing slithered over the shiny surface.

''Morning,' Roger said. 'Sorry I'm late. What've you got?'

'I am trying to make sure that nothing has been forgotten,' said Jameson. 'Mr Klemm was good enough to allow me to see a copy of his notes.'

'What did he miss?' asked Roger, and laughed. 'Never mind – it would be a miracle if we didn't all miss something when things happen as fast as they did last night. Had any bright ideas yourself?'

Jameson was looking puzzled at Roger's manner.

'No, sir, but I have certain information for you.' When Roger didn't ask what, he went on. 'I have seen Mr du Toit, who is most grateful for everything you have done already. I took the liberty last night, after you had retired, of telephoning Mr du Toit and also my Colonel in Pretoria.' Jameson spoke as if he had made a local call, not one halfway across the world. 'It is now known that Mr Van der Lunn's apartment in Johannesburg has been burgled, and thoroughly searched, and many documents of importance have been stolen. There is one thing which we overlooked last night.'

Roger went very still. 'Is there?'

'Yes, sir, there is.' Jameson looked as if he hated having to say this. 'We did not search for any luggage which Mr Van der Lunn had with him.'

Relieved, Roger said drily: 'No. But we should have a report from the Division during the morning; they did all the searching at the hotel.' He ran through the pile of correspondence on his desk, and unearthed a sealed envelope with a *By Hand From SW Division* on it. 'Here's Pen's report.' He slit open the envelope and began to read aloud: 'Nothing of Lewis's found at the Common View Hotel except oddments taken from his clothes – handkerchief, keys, coins, stamps. Nothing of any importance ... Rebecca and Joshua Bradshaw state that when Lewis was brought to the

hotel on Monday evening he had only the clothes he stood up in, no wallet, no money, no luggage—' Roger glanced up at Jameson, who was smiling with satisfaction. 'They say that they didn't see the man who brought Lewis. Only David Bradshaw saw him, although there is a possibility that David's wife Elizabeth caught a glimpse of the man. A newspaper boy who was mending a puncture in his bicycle tyre saw a taxi arrive. A man answering Lewis's description was inside. The boy says David Bradshaw, in uniform, helped the passenger out and carried him upstairs. The taxi then drove off. Could have been a genuine taxi,' Roger observed, and went on: 'Ah! Pendleton is asking all of his people to report if they saw a taxi near Common View Hotel that night. He should have some news in this morning. Doesn't miss much, does he?'

'No one in your Force appears to miss very much,' said Jameson with obvious feeling.

'Now what else?' Roger asked, almost as if he were speaking to himself. 'Elizabeth Bradshaw returned to the hotel at two forty-five, that's about right ... Pendleton has questioned all three of them again this morning and their stories are identical with the statements they made last night ... Dr Abbott, who was acting *locum* for the Divisional police-surgeon this week was called to the house by Rebecca Bradshaw, that's corroborated . . He examined Van der Lunn and came to the conclusion that he was suffering from an overdose of drugs and wanted him removed to hospital at once, but David and Joshua Bradshaw wouldn't allow it. That was what made Abbott suspicious. So Abbott went back to the Divisional HQ to tell Pendleton he thought something was wrong at the hotel, and noticed the photograph pinned up on the board' Roger looked up. 'Not much more we need from that. If you've any questions you want to ask, make a list and we'll talk to Pendleton this afternoon.'

'I will do that,' Jameson promised.

'What next?'

'I hope you will allow me to be present when you question David Bradshaw.'

'Yes, and we'll go straight over. He'll have to be charged formally in court some time today, but we have an afternoon hearing if we want it. Let's go over to Cannon Row. Have you ever been there?' he asked as he stood up.

'No. But I have often heard of it.'

'It's the nearest police-station to the Yard and does a lot of our chores for us,' Roger said. 'A night in the cell might have made Bradshaw remember a lot of things he forgot last night.'

The Station Superintendent, elderly and paunchy and somewhat cynical, said that after his wife had been released, the prisoner had settled down and fallen asleep. He had been woken with breakfast, but had dozed off again soon afterwards.

The superintendent sent for the sergeant-in-charge of cells, a middle-aged barrel of a man with an unexpectedly high-pitched voice, who led the way, jangling keys with absent minded relish. An elderly man without collar or tie sat dejectedly behind the bars of one cell. Two were empty. In the fourth was David Bradshaw, who was sitting on the bed reading a magazine. He looked relaxed and rested – satisfied, Roger thought oddly.

Bradshaw looked up. He nodded recognition, glanced at Jameson with casual interest, and said:

'Thank you for being so considerate to my wife, Superintendent.' His voice was hoarse in a croaking kind of way.

'We're only interested in making the guilty pay,' Roger said prosily.

The sergeant unlocked the cell door, let Roger and Jameson in, and shut the door on them.

'Like me to stay close by, sir?'

'I'll be at least a quarter of an hour. You'll be within earshot, won't you?'

'Oh, yes.' The sergeant locked them in, and went off, his orders carried out to the letter.

Roger turned to Bradshaw.

'If you're being pushed around by some big shots, we'll do all we can for you if you help us find them.' He let this sink in. 'This statement—' He tapped a copy of the statement

which Bradshaw had made and signed the previous night. 'It can't be true.'

'Every word is,' asseverated the BOAC steward.

'You say you have no idea who gave you the bags of diamonds or who collected them. But you've been at this game for months, on your own admission.'

'I tell you I wouldn't know the men from Adam,' insisted Bradshaw. He looked rather like a scraggy turkey with his long neck and big nose, as he darted round on Jameson. 'He might be one of them for all I know. A mechanic or one of the porters at the airport might slip them to me. Sometimes they'd be put on the aircraft in my bag. I always had to leave it unlocked. When I got the stuff to London and past the Customs, someone I'd never seen before would come up and ask for it. Or else when I arrived here, someone would be waiting for me, and I'd be told to leave the stuff in that old umbrella on the porch.'

'How did you know you were giving it to the right man, or the right man was getting it?'

'There was a kind of code word,' answered Bradshaw. 'That's what it amounted to, anyhow. Whoever spoke to me asked for "that piece of wash-leather" or told me where to put "that piece of wash-leather". It was a kind of joke, and after a while it seemed so easy I almost forgot there was anything wrong about it.'

'Last night you said that once you'd started you were blackmailed into going on with it,' Roger said sharply.

'So I was—at first. Then it became a kind of habit.'

'What threats were used?'

'They always said that if I didn't do what I was told they'd slip some diamonds in my baggage and report it to Customs,' said Bradshaw. 'I didn't know who they were, so I couldn't give them away. *They* were all right. And I knew that if my wife knew, she would have a terrible shock. Superintendent, what do you think will happen to me? How long do you think I'll spend in prison?'

'You could halve the time of your sentence if you helped us find your accomplices and employers,' said Roger.

'You don't take no for an answer easily, do you?' asked

Bradshaw with a flash of spirit. 'What I don't know I can't tell you.'

'Would you recognize any of these men again?'

Bradshaw hesitated. 'I might, I suppose.'

'Can't you be sure?'

'Not until I see one of them,' answered Bradshaw. He added with a note of desperation: 'Listen, it was like this. I'd be walking from the airport buildings towards the aircraft and someone would sidle up to me and push the packet into my hand or my pocket. Or I'd go and open my case and find something tucked down the side. Or I'd meet a man at a bar who wouldn't look at me but would whisper something about "wash-leather", so that I knew what to do. And I'd been warned not to take a close look at any of these chaps – I didn't want my throat cut.'

'Did you seriously think you'd have your throat cut if you let them down?' asked Roger.

'The way they threatened me didn't leave much doubt.'

After a pause, Roger said: 'Was it always a different man or woman?'

'As far as I know, yes.'

'Did you ever see the same man or woman twice?'

'If they were the same I didn't recognize them.'

'How often have you done this on average?'

'About once every couple of weeks.'

'For six months?'

'Seven months, as a matter of fact.'

'So you've been told what to do by over two dozen people – here and in South Africa.' Roger paused. 'Do you know what you're saying? Over twenty four people are involved in this smuggling, not just one or two.'

Bradshaw said, almost savagely: 'That's right, and how do you know I'm the only steward they use? How do you know they don't use other stewards on the BOAC and TWA, and South African Airlines and KLM and Qantas, and all the rest who use Pretoria and Johannesburg and come to London? And if it comes to that, what makes you think the diamonds are smuggled only to London? Eh? What makes you think that?'

Roger said slowly: 'I didn't say I thought anything of the kind Bradshaw, you're in deep trouble.'

'Don't I know it!'

'Deeper than you think.'

'What the hell do you mean?'

'I mean you know the size of this organization, and you know a lot more about it than you pretend to,' said Roger. 'You can still help yourself by telling us everything, but you're bound to make it worse for yourself if you keep on lying.'

'I'm not lying,' Bradshaw insisted harshly 'Any fool could tell this was a big racket, and I'm not that kind of a fool. If they used as many operatives as that when dealing with me it had to be big, and if it was that big it was probably worldwide Don't tell me you hadn't realized that.'

. . .

Bradshaw was quite right, this had all the indications of an extensive criminal organization with world-wide ramifications So it could tie-in with the assignment Nightingale of *The Globe* was on, and with the diamond smuggling which Hammerton was investigating. There was little doubt that Jameson and the South African Embassy knew or at least suspected the truth. Jameson must have known. Hardy must have had a pretty good idea, too. He would not have been so pleased with the situation, du Toit and the Ambassador wouldn't have been so appreciative of the results of last night's activities, unless they had known cause for such elation.

Bradshaw was too preoccupied with his special brand of self-justification to notice Roger's tension. Jameson was standing on one side, somehow merging into the cell walls, part of the wall rather than one of the three people present. Roger's mind started to work more smoothly. What else should he ask Bradshaw? What was likely to break Bradshaw down except danger to his wife?

Roger was already saying: '... what else did they tell you about Lewis?'

'Lewis, Lewis, what the hell's the use of keeping on about

Lewis,' croaked Bradshaw. 'I've been going to and from Johannesburg long enough to know all the big shots, so why don't you stop pretending about Van der Lunn. They just told me to give him these tablets to keep him quiet, they said they were sedatives and wouldn't do him any harm—'

'Who said?' interrupted Roger.

'I was called to the telephone at Johannesburg. A man told me I wouldn't have any wash-leather to worry about I was to look after a passenger. He said I'd find some tablets pushed into my pocket as I left the telephone booth, and I was to follow the instructions on the label one tablet every four hours for Van der Lunn. If you hadn't rushed me last night he would have been all right'

'Why did you try to get him out of the hotel?' Roger demanded harshly.

'I had to try! I thought if I could get him away you wouldn't have anything on me. There was nothing at the hotel. You couldn't find what wasn't there, so all I had to do was get rid of Van der Lunn. I didn't realize you had the place surrounded, or I wouldn't have run for it. And I didn't throw him out, he fell. It was an accident, you can't blame me for that.'

'You'll be surprised what you can be blamed for,' Roger said grimly. 'You'll be charged this afternoon with kidnapping Lewis—'

'Van der Lunn!'

'Didn't it ever occur to you that you might be wrong?' demanded Roger. He heard voices along the passage, and thought that someone was asking for him, but he did not look away from Bradshaw. 'Have you got a lawyer?'

Bradshaw was momentarily silenced. He moistened his lips, and then said in that croaking voice:

'Beth will see to that. Beth. Beth always looks after everything. She'll get me a lawyer.' In that moment he sounded pathetic.

Then, he saw someone behind Roger, beyond the steel bars in the passage. And on the moment of recognizing whoever was there, terror blazed up in his eyes. Roger swung round. The barrel-shaped sergeant in-charge of cells was

talking to a small man who was looking at Roger, and saying, 'Yes, it's a very urgent message' He took his right hand from his pocket, but there was no message, only a gun. The movement was so casual that at first the significance did not dawn on Roger. The man fired twice at David Bradshaw, and then once at the sergeant-in-charge who leapt at him, striking at the gun. The sergeant cried out and fell back; the gunman turned and raced along the passage; Bradshaw simply crumpled up until he was a sprawling, straggly heap on the floor. Roger sprang to the bars and shook them and shouted:

'Stop that man! Stop him!'

He heard the clatter of footsteps, another shot, a thud as of a man falling. Then he heard Jameson saying in an anguished voice:

'He's dead, he's dead.'

. . .

One bullet had caught Bradshaw in the left temple, the other in the left eye. Death must have been instantaneous.

## II

## *BETH BRADSHAW*

ROGER FOLLOWED the events of the next hideous hour on a teletype machine in *Information*, with Hardy on one side and the Inspector-in charge on the other. The Information Room was as always crowded and busy, there were hundreds of other investigations and dozens of newly reported crimes coming up on the teletype, the telephones and the map tables. Everywhere the controlled, streamlined sense of disorder, which Roger knew so well, was very evident. Now all he could think about was the one case - his case, which had seemed completely under his control and was now spread to the winds.

The messages were brief and to the point:

*Flash: Charge room sergeant and outside-duty constable reported man running out of Cannon Row Police-station. Duty constable gave chase, and was shot in the right leg.*

*Flash Sergeant-in charge of Cannon Row wounded in chest, immediate report says wound not serious.*

*Flash: Man seen to rush out of Cannon Row towards Westminster Bridge and to leap on pillion of waiting motor-scooter, colour pale blue.*

*Flash. Scooter believed to have headed south on far side of Westminster Bridge. All Divisions alerted.*

*Flash: Police-surgeon stated that David Bradshaw was presumably killed by bullets fired at close range. Autopsy arranged for early pm.*

*Flash: No trace of scooter or rider or passenger.*

*Flash Duty constable's leg wound not serious.*

*Flash. Condition of sergeant in charge of cells more serious than at first realized, now being prepared for operation at Charing Cross Hospital.*

*Flash Pale blue Lambretta motor-scooter believed to have been seen near Lambeth Bridge being followed by Divisional car.*

*Flash Lambretta motor-scooter overtaken, rider and passenger able to establish fact that they were not at Westminster at the time of the attack.*

*Flash: Man who attacked police and killed prisoner at Cannon Row now described as of about 5 feet 3 inches in height, sallow complexion, dark hair, dressed in Italian-style suit, tapered trousers, pointed shoes with low heels, narrow brimmed embroidered trilby-style hat.*

So it went on, until Hardy turned to Roger, and for the second time that day placed a hand on his shoulder, now in commiseration and understanding.

'We've lost the swine,' the *Information* CI said. 'Be damned lucky to get him now. I – what's this?'

*Flash. Bullet which passed through David Bradshaw's temple now identified as a .22 Italian style correction* ***Italian-manufactured bullet.***

'Still got a chance, then,' remarked Hardy. 'Well, everyone's been alerted: all stations, ports, and airfields have been warned to look out for him. He may not find it so easy to get away.' But Hardy was not as optimistic as he tried to sound. 'I suppose it could have been worse. I hope Wardle's all right.'

'Wardle?' queried *Information.*

'The sergeant over at Cannon Row,' said Roger. He nodded to the inspector and went out with Hardy, acutely aware of the fact that everyone looked at him with exceptional intentness. It was inevitable that when policemen were attacked something happened at the Yard: a tense, keyed up atmosphere affected everyone.

In the passage, Roger asked Hardy: 'Still *carte blanche* for me?'

'More necessary than ever, I'd say.'

'Oh, I don't know,' said Roger. I was half inclined to believe that Bradshaw didn't know more than he'd said' When Hardy didn't answer, Roger went on 'I'd like to go over to see his wife, and find out if she's got more information than she's told us.' In an undertone, he added: 'I wonder if she's heard ' There was a real possibility that the newspapers had the story, and had already been to Common View Hotel.

Twenty five minutes later, he knew they had.

Half a dozen men were outside the door of the hotel, which had an even more dilapidated look in daylight Two constables were on the doorsteps, keeping the men at bay. They swooped on Roger when he stepped out of his car, cameras pointing, lights flashing, question after question being flung at him.

'Did you see the gunman, West?'

'Were you hurt, Superintendent?'

'Did you try to stop the attack?'

'Who was the coloured man with you at the time?'

'Any news of Sergeant Wardle?'

Roger turned round from the steps, and said. 'The last news I had of Wardle was bad, and that makes me even more anxious to get on with the job.'

'Have you got the killer, Super?'

'Any hope of arrest?'

'If ever I give up hope of making an arrest I'll stop being a policeman,' Roger replied. He turned round and stepped beyond the porch. Another policeman was in the hall, and coming down the stairs was a remarkably dapper little man, a shiny, polished individual wearing a black coat and striped trousers and glossy shoes, a Victorian solicitor's clerk of a character He stopped on the bottom tread and was still half an inch shorter than Roger.

'Are you Superintendent West?' His voice was perhaps a little too cultivated to be natural.

'Yes.'

'I'm Abbott, Dr Abbott. Are you hoping to see Mrs Elizabeth Bradshaw?'

Roger's heart dropped. 'I must see her, yes.'

'I can tell you that you won't garner any information from her,' declared Abbott 'She refuses to take a sedative; she does nothing but sit on the bed and cry I have told her sister in law that I think the paroxysm will soon pass, and told her what to do once the poor woman is amenable. Very bad business indeed, isn't it?'

'Yes,' Roger said mechanically.

'I'm glad you weren't hurt, anyhow.' Abbott nodded and walked past Roger, then swung round as if he had been stung. 'Oh, Superintendent!'

'Yes?'

'Is this affair still to be kept from the Press?'

'No reason why you shouldn't tell them how the woman's affected,' answered Roger. 'If they ask you anything about the identity of the man, will you just say that all you know is that his name is Lewis?'

'Very well,' said Dr Abbott, and he turned and stepped on to the porch, a little ridiculous with his correctness and his polish. Roger found himself smiling: the law was helped on its way by a lot of remarkable and some very peculiar men. As he reached the foot of the stairs, Rebecca Bradshaw appeared from the door which led to the kitchen quarters and the owners' living-room. She looked pale as well as plump, but there was something different about her, she had washed her hair, and it was drawn straight back from the forehead and kept in place with a band over the top, so that it was severely straight from the forehead halfway across the head, and then billowed out in a frizzy mop The style suited her. It showed her features up well, suggested that if she lost a few pounds well, ten pounds or so she might be a handsome woman with a fine figure The tight-fitting black jumper which she wore accentuated the fullness of her bosom, the smallness of her waist and the sweeping curves of her hips.

'Good morning, Mrs Bradshaw. I'm Superintendent West'

'I know,' she said. Her voice was strangely taut. 'We aren't likely to forget you. What do you want?'

'I need to talk to your sister-in law,' Roger said quietly. 'I won't worry her more than I must.'

'You'll worry her until she kills herself.' The words seemed to have more bite because of the slow, deliberate way in which Rebecca uttered them: it was as if she meant to make sure that each one counted. 'You'll drive her to her death just as you took her husband to his.'

Roger said flatly: 'Shall I go up, or would you like to take me up?'

She pushed past him and led the way He knew that he should be able to disregard her words, but they stung It was quite right that he had taken David Bradshaw to his death, and that the police had done nothing at all to save his life. What use was it to argue that no one would have dreamed of such an attack? That there had been no warning? At heart, he knew, he should have realized that if Bradshaw could give information away he would be in danger. The truth was

that he had been fooled into believing that Bradshaw had been on the fringe.

As he followed the woman, Roger noticed the fullness of her calves, the unusual thinness of her ankles, and her very small feet. She walked with a spring in every step, muscles flexing.

A man was speaking in the room on the right, the one where Roger had been the previous night. Rebecca tapped sharply on the door, pushed it open, and announced

'Here's that man West.'

She stood aside, and Roger went in. Joshua Bradshaw, looking remarkably like his brother, was standing by the dressing table looking down on Elizabeth. Elizabeth lay on the bed, her knees bent, curled up as if she were trying to go back to the womb in her search for comfort. She wasn't crying, but tears stained her cheeks. She was deathly, shockingly pale, and that was emphasized by her dark, wavy hair. Her eyes were open, and she stared straight ahead of her as if all she wanted to see was the dressing-table at waist-height.

Joshua said viciously:

'Why the hell can't you leave her alone?'

'If you want to hear what I have to ask her, keep quiet,' Roger said. 'If you interrupt I'll send for one of my men to take notes. That will make admissible evidence of everything she says – anything any of you says for that matter.' He glared at Joshua, who gulped and shifted his position. Anger still glowed in his eyes. He had a larger Adam's apple than David Bradshaw's, and an even longer and scraggier neck. His nose was larger and more hooked, too. In fact, he looked like a caricature of his dead brother, and it passed through Roger's mind that his wife must have found a lot of quality in him to outweigh his gobbler-like appearance.

Roger moved to the head of the bed, pulled a chair fairly close, and spoke very quietly.

'Mrs Bradshaw, none of us can help your husband now, but you might be able to help his memory.'

She did not shift her gaze or stir.

'I doubt if anyone else can do this,' said Roger. 'The fact that he was murdered so wickedly suggests that someone

wanted to make sure that he couldn't talk to the police. Do you understand me?'

She didn't stir or look at him.

'So we're bound to think that your husband probably knew much more than he admitted. This is a vicious and evil criminal organization. If your husband wasn't really part of it, or didn't know how bad it was, there's no reason why his memory should be smeared.'

Elizabeth Bradshaw did not show any sign that she heard, did not even appear to know he was there. He hitched his chair closer, and resisted the temptation to look up into the faces of the other couple, who had been scared into silence by his outburst and were standing very still.

'If you know he was deeply involved but had been forced into doing what he did, then we need to know that too. It will lessen the slur on his memory and it will help to make sure that no one else is victimized like he was, that no one else suffers as you're suffering.'

Rebecca burst out: 'You're torturing her! Why don't you leave her alone?'

Now Roger had reason to look up at Rebecca, and so to turn away from that death-mask of a face. He remembered how Rebecca had suggested that her sister-in law might kill herself, and was quite prepared to believe that she would try.

'If you think I'm torturing her, try to imagine what will happen if she doesn't help me,' he said. 'She'll be questioned day after day after day. She may have to give evidence when we've caught the murderer, and also when we've caught the murderer's other accomplices. Instead of getting this all off her chest now, she'll find it building up inside her like a cancer. I've come here alone so as to give her a chance to talk freely. What she says to me while I'm on my own can't be used in evidence. But if she doesn't talk freely she'll have to be formally questioned, and we'll have to take her to the Yard. Can't you make her see that this is the best way to help her?'

'*Help* her,' Rebecca said chokingly.

Then, for the first time, Elizabeth Bradshaw moved. She raised her head on the pillow, slowly, and straightened her legs with almost painful slowness. She kept moving her head until she met Roger's intent gaze. It was like looking into the face of death, except for her eyes, which were like burning glass, they were so fiercely bright.

'If it weren't for you, my David would be alive,' she said in a toneless voice. 'Now I've nothing worth living for. Nothing worth living for.'

After a pause, a long pause, while Rebecca stepped forward and Joshua made a strangled noise in his throat, tears began to well up in those burning eyes; they began to flow, began to pour. Suddenly the death like face twisted into an awful expression of grief. Elizabeth's mouth opened, her jaws seemed to work violently.

Then she began to cry on a terrible, high-pitched note.

## 12

## *DEAD END?*

ROGER WAITED in the hall downstairs, haunted by a mental image of the woman's face He had left the room soon after the outburst. Since then, he knew, Rebecca had persuaded her sister-in-law to take some of the tablets which Abbott had left, and managed to make her drink some hot milk. Now, both the Bradshaws were upstairs with her. They had to be questioned, no matter what their mood. There was no possibility of postponing the interrogation, but that didn't mean there was going to be anything to relish about it.

The telephone bell rang.

The wall telephone was in a corner by the stairs, and Roger went towards it, lifted the receiver, and said in a formal voice:

'Common View Hotel.'

'Is Superintendent West there, please?' It was one of the operators at the Yard.

'Speaking. Who wants me?'

'Mr Klemm, sir.'

'Put him through.' Roger thought he heard a sound upstairs, but no one appeared. Almost at once, Klemm came on the line. He began to speak hurriedly.

'Sorry to worry you while you're there, sir, but two or three things need your attention. Mr Pendleton rang up to say that so far he hasn't had any luck with that taxi driver. All the neighbours have been questioned, as well as some people who were on Clapham Common. It's a thousand to one chance of finding out who it was now – shall we drop it?'

'No. Keep at it. Ask the Taxi-Drivers' Association and the owners to help, too.'

'Right. Nothing on that motor scooterist, either, I'm afraid - looks as if the chap got clean away. But if he's still in the country, we'll get him,' Klemm added hastily. 'The noon meeting here, sir - I've postponed it until two o'clock, as you're not back. Jameson's been sent for by South Africa House, but he'll be back before two. Is that all right?'

'Yes, good.'

'I've been in touch with Hammerton at London Airport, and he's preparing a complete file on all the suspected smugglers over the past six or seven months. People whom Customs have turned inside out. It's going to be a huge job, checking on all air-crews – in fact, Hammerton says it's going to be impossible except at intervals over a long period.'

'I know what he means,' Roger said. 'But we can't work only through him.' His mind was beginning to tick over smoothly, quickly. 'Make a list of all the airlines which serve South Africa from London, and lay on visits to all the head offices - I'll brief you with what to say to them later. Then we need to draft a memo which we can send to police forces in all the world's largest metropolitan areas, outlining the situation. In other words, what we've got to do is to make a

skeleton plan and put it into operation as soon as possible. The thing we're after for a start is any unexplained increase in supplies or stocks of industrial diamonds, or changes in the ruling prices for them, anything to suggest that any market's been flooded lately. Is McKay with you?'

'Yes. Raring to go.'

'Get busy on this job between you, and make sure you have a couple of typists from the pool ready to type anything out at a moment's notice.' Now Roger felt that he was beginning to see the investigation in its right perspective, and it built excitement up in him. 'We want to get information from all major capitals about diamond thefts, especially packets of industrial diamonds, or missing consignments. Then we need information from all airlines which run South African services, telling us what consignments have been reported stolen or suspected stolen from their aircraft. Next, we want all insurance companies who've paid out claims checked here and abroad. You get the drift? Draw up a plan of campaign with McKay.'

'Yes, sir!' Klemm sounded delighted. After all, it was the kind of job which any chief inspector would love to get his teeth into. Klemm and McKay doubtless saw this as a major stepping-stone towards promotion to superintendency, and if they helped to crack the case, they would deserve it.

'Anything else?' Roger asked.

'There is one thing' Klemm said that in a tone which suggested that he wished there wasn't. 'The story's leaked. Once the news of the shooting in Cannon Row got out – a couple of Reuter's men were in the pub at the time, and they knew about it within a few minutes – we couldn't hold it back. The fact that Lewis is really Van der Lunn is known, too. The Back-Room Inspector is being besieged by Fleet Street men, and I gather that South Africa House also has its hands full. Nothing we can do to stem that tide.'

Roger said thoughtfully: 'It might help in the long run. What's our official statement?'

'Hardy – the AC I mean – wants to know what you think.'

'Three things in a hurry,' Roger said. '*First*, describe that

scooter – the driver as well as you can, and the killer fully. *Two*, ask for anyone who knows David Bradshaw to come forward. *Three*, put out a description of Van der Lunn and ask anyone who saw him at the airfield or afterwards, and anyone who might have seen that taxi deliver him to the Common View Hotel, to come forward. All clear?'

'Got the lot.'

'Spread it around fast – it can be given to all the Press, television, and radio. Ask for full co-operation – oh, and build the thing up as a huge diamond-smuggling conspiracy.'

'Will do,' replied Klemm, and he sounded as if he couldn't wait to hang up and start carrying out these instructions. No one could doubt that he would put everything he had got into this: if there was a danger, it was that he would be overeager, and perhaps miss something obvious because he tried to do too much too quickly.

'I'll see you,' Roger said, and rang off.

As he did so, he became conscious of being watched. Until the moment of ringing off, he hadn't been aware of it, but now he knew that someone standing above him had been listening. He did not look up. Whoever it was must have moved and made a slight sound which had been noticeable as soon as he stopped talking. Roger stepped very slowly towards the foot of the stairs. Soon Rebecca Bradshaw appeared on the half landing, making no attempt to hide or to pretend she hadn't been listening. It passed through Roger's mind that Rebecca's husband often seemed to be the one to look after Elizabeth, and he wondered why. He moved back from the stairs and watched Rebecca coming down. He thought something had happened to change her attitude; certainly there was now nothing like the previous venom there had been in her expression or in the way she spoke.

'You don't lose much time, do you?' she remarked.

'There isn't much to lose. How is Mrs Bradshaw?'

'Asleep, thank God.' Rebecca smoothed that very flat hair down with her right hand; she had small, pale hands, quite as delicate looking as her feet. Rough hotel work seemed the

last thing she should do. 'I suppose we ought to be grateful because you made her break down; she might be better after this. It's about all we ever shall be grateful to you for.'

Roger said: 'Mrs Bradshaw, there are some aspects of my job which I dislike as much as you do, but it doesn't alter the fact that I have to do it. You heard me ask for all friends of David to come forward. I've got to piece together a complete picture of his life in the past year, say. I've got to know all the people he knew, everything there is to know about him. You and his brother can help more than anyone, if only you will. And the quicker we see this picture, the quicker the whole bad business will be over.'

She said: 'I daresay.'

'Will you and your husband be sensible, and give us all the help you can?'

'What about your well-known threat that if we don't we'll probably come under suspicion?'

'You're already under suspicion,' Roger retorted. 'The only way to help yourself is to tell the whole story. First I want to ask you a lot of questions, then I want to ask the same questions of your husband. If you're both telling the truth, the statements will be identical on all important matters, won't they?'

After a long pause, Rebecca said ungraciously: 'All right, let's have the questions.'

She answered him briskly and briefly, and apparently without any evasions, but if she in fact was telling the truth, she knew very little about her brother-in-law. He had spent much of his off-duty time here at Common View, but for all she knew he might have spent a lot of time elsewhere in London or anywhere in England without his wife or relations knowing. Whenever he had left the hotel they had assumed it was for the airport, but they had no proof.

'As a matter of fact, Josh and I have always wondered if he had a little bit of fluff on the side,' Rebecca said. 'He's like a sailor, got every chance of leading a double life. Not that there was ever any evidence, and God knows that Beth worshipped the very ground he trod on, as they say. If it ever

came out that he did have a floosie tucked away it would break her right up.'

Roger said slowly: 'Maybe she isn't so fragile as you think.' Rebecca put her head on one side in response to that, but made no comment. Roger took a picture of Nightingale of *The Globe* from his pocket and handed it to her, regarding it as no more than routine. 'Do you know this man?'

Her eyes rounded, and even before she uttered a word it was obvious that the answer would be yes.

'Do I! He's a man named Knight, a commercial traveller. He's often stayed here lately. He and David got quite chummy – their nights often coincided. What's he been up to?'

. . .

It was one of the days when Hardy didn't go out to lunch. He was putting on weight, so he cut down on his eating whenever it wasn't too much of an effort. He listened to Roger, nodded, and said:

'So here's something else to get your teeth into. Keep at it, Handsome, but don't expect miracles. This job's been going on for too long to be solved in a day.'

Roger said half unthinkingly: 'From here, anyhow.'

'What's that?'

'If we're right and there's a world wide organization there's also a heart to it, and that's probably in South Africa,' Roger said. 'If it's going to be stopped quickly it may have to be from there.'

'Is that a hint?' Hardy was half smiling, half frowning.

'Hint? I meant it as a simple statement of opinion.'

'I thought you were hinting that you ought to go to South Africa and sort it out from there,' said Hardy, drily. 'By the way, I've a conference this afternoon at the Home Office and I expect it will go on very late. Tomorrow I've got the Police Conference. I'll be available in emergency, but handle everything without me if you can.'

'I'll try to,' Roger promised.

He went out, thinking: '*Was* I hinting?'

He went down to the canteen for a hamburger and some coffee, remembering what Janet had said: it was amazing how often she was right. None of the people immediately concerned with the investigation was present. A few superintendents asked odd questions, there was a lot of evidence of the grim determination of the Yard to find the man who had attacked a policeman in order to kill David Bradshaw. Yet Roger fancied that he detected a note almost of resignation; everyone knew that this particular killer was going to be very difficult to find.

He was at his office at five to two. Two minutes later, it was crowded, with Klemm, Jameson, Gorlay, and McKay. McKay was as Scottish as he looked, with sandy hair which curled a lot, but was spread thin over his egg-shaped head, a gangling figure vaguely like that of the Bradshaws, a Scottish accent on which twenty years in the Metropolitan Police had made little impression, Roger was so used to it that he hardly realized that McKay had an accent.

Gorlay brought in two extra chairs, and they drew close to the table. Klemm had drawn a rough graph, showing the air-routes from the Jan Smuts airfield, the main international airport of South Africa which served both Johannesburg and Pretoria, and lists of the companies involved. There were BOAC, South African Airways, Air France, Alitalia, KLM, Lufthansa, and several others.

Jameson, who had been to South Africa House for briefing, came back with more detailed information about the operation of the Jan Smuts airfield. A plan of campaign built up quickly. Klemm and McKay had snatched the opportunity like drowning men at a straw. Roger made a few suggestions but wanted to alter nothing.

'All right,' he said, at three o'clock. 'The next thing is a draft of a letter to be sent to all the airlines, another letter to be sent to all the police, preferably with a questionnaire – questionnaires get the information if the questions are lucid enough. Get all three drafted. Get envelopes ready for immediate posting – we want to post these tonight, even if it's midnight. We'd better put some photographs in – of Night-

ingale, Lewis *alias* Van der Lunn, and David Bradshaw. We'll need to enclose a description of the Cannon Row murderer, too.' Roger noticed Klemm about to interrupt and then think better of it. He grinned. 'All right, you make up a packet of enclosures. I'll go through them when I come back from *The Globe*.'

Jameson also looked as if he would like to say something, but couldn't pluck up courage.

'Anyone any bright ideas before I talk to *The Globe*?' Roger asked.

'There is one thing which might be worth doing,' said Jameson.

All of them turned towards him, as if knowing that whatever he suggested would be worth listening to. Diffidently, he went on:

'First, we have an outline map of the world showing the airlines which serve the world's capitals from South Africa.' He pointed to one of the documents which had already been prepared. 'Attached to each we have the schedules of all flights made from Johannesburg to these world capitals. We surely need to obtain details of the crews of all the aircraft, and this is one of the items of information we shall obtain from the airline head offices. However, there is one thing which I learned at South Africa House. They can now tell us on which flights and to which capitals Mr Van der Lunn has flown in the past six months. These are, I fear, very extensive. I think perhaps it would be wise to find out if this newspaper reporter, Nightingale, has been to any of them about the same time.'

# 13

## *MORE COINCIDENCE?*

NOTHING HAD changed at *The Globe* offices, there were the same doormen, messenger boys, and lift attendant When Roger entered the outer editorial office, Faith Soames smiled at him and stood up, looking delighted to see him She had the ability to make him feel that her interest was exclusively in him, and he wondered whether she had that effect on all men. As she opened the door of her uncle's office and stood aside for Roger to pass through, he suspected that she deliberately stood where she did so that their bodies would have to touch — as she had once before Her complexion was flawless; her smile had a touch of rare intimacy.

She closed the door on Roger, quietly.

Soames was sitting right back in his big chair, one hand bunched on the desk, the knuckles lumpy with swelling joints He might almost have been sitting there all the time since Roger had last seen him He made the same gesture to get up and shake hands, and dropped back into his chair with a grunt which he tried to pretend was a cough.

'I'll tell you one thing, before you start in with your questions,' he said. 'My secretary is a kind of natural sex symbol, and she recognizes a challenging symbol in you Most men she keeps at a distance, can't even bear to let them touch her. Be careful, she's a minx with advanced views.'

Roger said drily: 'With a broad-minded uncle, I gather.'

'What's being broad minded?' asked Soames. 'She's an attractive young female, you're a handsome male Do I have to be broad minded to acknowledge the fact that male and female are mate worthy? But you didn't come here to talk about Faith. Have you found Nightingale?'

'No,' said Roger. 'But a man who was by way of being a friend of his was murdered today.'

Soames did not speak, but his big lips parted, and then closed very tightly together. They were silent for what seemed a long time, before he said:

'Unless my staff's slipping, there's only been one murder in England today. David Bradshaw?'

'Yes'

'Nightingale doesn't make friends easily.'

'Unless he cultivated friendship deliberately,' Roger said 'Mr Soames, one of two things seems to be certain. Either Nightingale was associated with David Bradshaw over the smuggling, and pretended to be a commercial traveller and went to Common View Hotel to meet Bradshaw as an associate or else he suspected Bradshaw and made a point of going to the hotel whenever Bradshaw was there It would be easy for him to find out what crews were on the aircraft coming in to London.'

Soames reflected, and then said: 'My money is on the probability that he suspected Bradshaw and scraped an acquaintance in order to obtain evidence about the case He told me he was getting close If he believed Bradshaw was a diamond thief or smuggler, then he was very close to the fringe, but not to the heart of the conspiracy'

'My money's not on one or the other,' Roger replied. 'But I hope you're right I'd hate a top Fleet Street man to be involved in this.'

'Don't believe it's even possible, especially with Nightingale,' Soames declared. 'Any other evidence involving him?'

'You might have some. I want to know where he's been overseas in the past six months You told me that he could go wherever he liked, and had instructions to break this case no matter where it took him. Where did it take him?'

'You must have some reason for asking that.'

'When I know the answers I'll tell you what I can,' Roger said.

Soames grunted, leaned forward and flicked up the switch on the inter-office talking box Without waiting for Faith to

say anything, and while staring straight into Roger's eyes, he said:

'The good Superintendent wants to know where Jim Nightingale has been in the last six months – especially when he's been out of the country. You should have that information handy, and what you haven't got, get quick. I've the Editorial group session for the next hour, so give Mr West all the help he needs and all the information he asks for. Also give him some tea and try to worm some information out of him – I think he's holding out on us.'

He paused and grinned. Then:

'Come in here as soon as you've got the files,' he ordered Immediately he flicked the little handle down, and then began his cumbersome movements out of his chair and on to his feet, followed by the painful walk to the communicating door, with the thick stick in his hand. He pushed the door open just as he had on the previous occasion, and this time spoke to someone who was in the board room. The door swung to. Roger heard a murmur of voices, but could not distinguish the words. He waited for a long time, half amused by what Soames had said about his niece; it was almost as if he had deliberately intended to make Roger aware of the girl's quite exceptional attractiveness.

Suddenly she came in, carrying tea and six cakes, oozing with cream, on a silver tray. Cups rattled pleasantly as she put the tray down on a corner of the littered desk, and pulled up a chair.

'These are my uncle's favourites,' she said. 'Cream slices and chocolate *éclairs* – at least he doesn't have to worry about his diet. It must be miserable to have to watch your weight.'

'I wouldn't know,' said Roger.

'Milk and sugar?'

'Just milk.'

'And you don't watch your weight,' Faith scoffed. She was as natural as if she were his own daughter, and it passed through Roger's mind that if she were ten years younger, perhaps even five years younger, she would be exactly the kind of girl he would like Martin or Richard to fall in love

with. She poured out. 'Do you like to relax over tea, or do you mix business with pleasure?'

'I do all my relaxing at home,' Roger said mildly.

'And faithful, too!' She handed him his cup and pushed the cakes towards him, then sat back in a small armchair, stretching out her long, slim legs: there was something feline about her manner and her movements. 'Well, let us proceed.' She picked up a sheet of paper and began to read: 'Our special correspondent James Nightingale was assigned to the mystery of the smuggled diamonds on March 27th, which means that he has been engaged exclusively on this case for six months. In that time he had made flights to the following countries: South Africa, twice, the United States (New York twice, the Argentine (Buenos Aires once—'

'Do you know the dates?'

'Do you need them now?'

'Please.'

She began to recite them, giving the impression that she expected him to challenge her, but he did not His greatest difficulty was to keep a poker face, for the dates coincided, one after another, with those on which Van der Lunn had visited the same cities, although the South African had made many other visits. Van der Lunn had always been based in Johannesburg and Nightingale in London, but it was surprising how often they had been in the same places at the same time, he might have missed one or two, Roger knew, but he estimated nine such coincidences.

Faith was looking at him as if she was no longer quite so sure of herself.

'I assure you that my memory is quite reliable,' she said.

'I m sure it is, but I'm not so proud of mine. Have you got all those written down?'

'Yes' She handed him the sheet of paper; the details were typed without blemish. Instead of drawing back into her chair, she leaned on the edge of it, towards him Today she wore a pale-green linen dress with a round neck, and as she leaned forward the neckline drooped forward. It was impossible for Roger not to see that she wore that kind of brassière which supported the lower but not the top part of

her breasts, and in a swift, quite compulsive glance he saw how beautifully shaped they were, saw too the smooth white skin, the shadow between. He looked up and into her eyes, she was smiling quite naturally.

'After all,' she said, 'I was told to seduce you, wasn't I?'

'After all,' Roger retorted with an effort, 'your uncle wasn't to know that half the wicked women I have to deal with think they're experts in seduction.'

Her expression changed and she drew back instinctively; he expected her to jump up, or at least move her chair back, was prepared for something like the outburst he had suffered from Rebecca Bradshaw only a few hours earlier. Faith's eyes were narrowed, and her lips pressed tightly together, and it seemed a long time before she spoke; but once speaking she relaxed, and the smile returned to curve her lips and warm her eyes.

'Handsome, I think I would really love to get to know you. You're quite the man of steel. Can you tell me why you're so anxious to find out where Jim Nightingale has been?' When Roger didn't answer at once, she went on: 'I don't mind admitting failure to myself, but I should hate my uncle to think that I failed so utterly.'

Roger laughed. 'I don't think it would surprise him. He knows a lot about policemen. I can tell you, off the record. It has to be off the record.'

'I promise.'

'Van der Lunn has been to these cities, too, and sometimes his visits have coincided with Nightingale's. Interesting, isn't it? I read through Nightingale's reports, but tell me something else.'

'If I can.'

Roger picked up a cream slice with a small fork, placed it on a plate, and tried to cut it; cream and jam filling oozed out. He ate a little, watching the girl all the time, and when he was halfway through the slice, he asked:

'Why was Nightingale assigned to this particular case?'

'He was sacrificed on the altar of the Great God News.'

'What made this case such big news?'

'I wonder if my uncle would want me to tell you that,'

mused Faith, and after a pause she went on: 'I don't think he would mind.' She took a tiny handkerchief from a pocket just below the waist of her dress, leaned forward again, and gently wiped Roger's lips. 'If you prove to be a messy eater I may have to change my mind about getting to know you. There have been some indications that South Africa has been short of foreign exchange, and my uncle wondered whether this smuggling was being condoned by the Government, and whether foreign currency was being earned as a result of it. Anything which might be a slap in the face for the Nationalist Government always was food and drink to him, but he would have to be absolutely sure of his facts before printing anything.'

'And he hasn't printed anything?'

'I must put you on the free list for *The Globe*,' Faith said 'No, he hasn't printed anything Jim Nightingale was following up every angle, remember. As I've pointed out several times, he is a very good newspaperman. In fact, I think he's one of the very best, and Fleet Street seems to share that opinion.'

'Meaning?' asked Roger.

'Think,' urged Faith.

In spite of himself, Roger laughed. 'If such a brilliant newspaperman couldn't find anything to print in support of this theory, there wasn't likely to be much support or justification.'

'Clever boy,' mocked Faith.

'Yes, aren't I?' Quite suddenly, and taking her by surprise, Roger got to his feet. He gathered up all the papers and tucked them into his briefcase, talking as he did so. 'Well, I must be off, cream cakes or not I've at least two conferences before I can go home tonight. Thank your uncle for me, won't you?'

'Aren't you going to thank me?'

'Of course,' said Roger. She was leaning back in her chair, looking as chaste and modest as a girl could. He bent down and kissed her lightly on the forehead. 'Thank you very much,' he said. 'For everything' He wrinkled his nose at her, and then went to the door, opening it before she was out

of her chair. He turned round to see what the effect was on her, he wasn't quite sure. She was biting her underlip, but her eyes seemed to be laughing at him.

'Goodbye,' he said, and went out.

As he went down in the lift, as he stepped into Fleet Street, chock a block with traffic in the evening rush hour, as he sat back in the police car and was driven slowly and frustratingly back to the Yard, he kept seeing a mental picture of Faith Soames. One word kept recurring to him, not now and again but time after time: the word was: 'desirable'.

. . .

Klemm, McKay, Jameson, and Gorlay were waiting for him in his office, and the two CI's seemed almost smug. When he saw what they had done, he conceded that smugness was almost justified. The questions to the police, airport police, and airline companies were reduced to the absolute minimum. Each question was phrased so that the recipient could answer quickly and simply. No one was going to find this a red-tape job. The one to the police forces read:

1 *Have you been requested to investigate the loss of any parcels of diamonds of any kind in the past twelve months?*

*If so, please state:*

2. *How many such requests have there been?*
3. *From which country was each parcel consigned?*
4. *Were they shipped by*

(a) *Air*
(b) *Sea*
(c) *Rail*

5. *Who requested the investigation?*
6. *What was the estimated value of each packet?*
7. *Did you recover the diamonds?*
8 *Were the thieves caught? If so, please name them.*
9. *Can you name any suspects, confidentially?*

10. *If more than one case, have you reason to believe the same people were involved?*

11. *If known, please state insurance company affected.*

12. *Have you any reason to suspect that diamonds have been lost by firms which acquired them unlawfully?*

The questions to the other authorities were as succinct.

Roger wished Hardy was in his office, so that he could vet them, but he wasn't, and Roger did not hold anything back. He made a few minor changes, then gave the word to have them mailed. 'Add twenty-four hours to the normal time needed for delivery, and then start telephoning,' he ordered. 'The first dozen replies will give us an indication of how things are going.'

Once the rush was over, it was surprising how flat the situation seemed He tied up all the loose ends, spoke to du Toit twice, and spent a session with the Embassy's Commercial Attaché. Hardy, still benign, approved what he had done. No reports of interest came in, but there seemed reason for hope until the Hampshire police reported that both men and the motor-scooter had flown from Hurn Airport to Cherbourg the previous evening. They might now be anywhere in Europe – or they might be flying to any part of the world.

. . .

After this had been reported to the team, quite suddenly Roger was alone in his office with Jameson.

He sensed that the South African had stayed behind for a purpose Roger had a strange thought that a lot of people would look at Jameson and feel that he was the perfect specimen of his race, just as Faith Soames seemed the perfect specimen of physical womanhood

'There is a matter I have to report to you personally,' Jameson said.

Roger sat up. 'What is it?'

'It is to do with Mr Nightingale.'

Every thought but of Nightingale faded from Roger's mind as he waited.

'Mr Nightingale has been arrested in Pretoria and is being questioned at Police Headquarters in connection with the diamond smuggling,' Jameson announced. 'Nothing has been said to the Press, and nothing will be said until you have advised Pretoria what you think should be released. It appears that Mr Nightingale presented a false passport at the Johannesburg Airport, hence his detention His subsequent arrest was due to the fact that industrial diamonds were found in his baggage.'

## 14

## *ORDER FROM HARDY*

ROGER COULD picture old Soames, sitting back, so sure of Nightingale's integrity. He could picture Faith, equally sure, almost laughing at him for suggesting that the reporter might be involved This news from Pretoria was not conclusive but it would shock Soames, and would mean that Nightingale's activities would have to be closely checked. He sat back, looking up at Jameson, who gave the impression that he so often did; that he was anxious for approval of his action, and perhaps a little fearful of having done the wrong thing.

Roger rubbed the back of his head, and began to smile.

'I'll have to check with the AC, but I should say this news wants releasing at once and it ought to be a scoop for *The Globe*.' He leaned forward and picked up the receiver and asked: 'See if you can get me Mr Hardy at his home, will you?' As he replaced the receiver, he waved to an upright chair with a padded seat Jameson sat down. 'What would you advise?' Roger asked him.

'The same as you, Mr West. I am never happy when news is held back. The wrong motives are too often imputed.'

'And we have enough problems dealing with the right ones,' Roger remarked drily. He pulled the graphs and the questionnaires towards him, looked through them again, and went on: 'I don't think we've missed much, but it will be a couple of days before we get the information we've asked for. If I had my way I'd send a man to every capital, then we'd get what we want in a few days.'

'Is there any hope of doing that?' asked Jameson.

'Not the slightest.'

'Mr West, there is one thing I would like to suggest,' said Jameson. 'I have already mentioned it to Mr du Toit, without committing anyone to any particular course of action. I think you should go to Pretoria and see Nightingale, as well as study the situation from South Africa. Some aspects of it may show up in a new light. I can believe that it would be impossible to send a man to every city, but do you think there is any chance of you going to my country?'

Roger looked at him very intently.

'Is this your suggestion? Or du Toit's?'

'It is like many things – a suggestion from me with which he is in full agreement,' said Jameson. He gave his diffident smile. 'He particularly asked me to find out what you would think personally if such a suggestion was made. Would you object, sir?'

Roger grinned. 'I'd jump at the chance – and even if I didn't I'd have to go wherever I was told.' The idea already had an attractive look about it, and he remembered Hardy's 'Was that a hint?' which suggested that even early this morning, long before the news of Nightingale's arrest, the possibility had been in the Assistant Commissioner's mind.

The telephone bell rang.

'That'll be Hardy.' He snatched off the receiver, and the operator said:

'I'm sorry, Mr West, but Mr Hardy isn't at home. Nor is Mrs Hardy. They are at some function, and are not expected back until after midnight. I think it might be possible to find out where they are, if you would like me to.'

'No,' decided Roger. 'Have a message left asking Mr Hardy to ring me at my home whatever time he gets back,

will you? ... Thanks ... And call my wife and say I'll be home in about half an hour. She – Hold on a moment.' He covered the mouthpiece with his hand and looked across at Jameson. 'Would you like to come home with me and talk the case out over a meal?'

'I am most grateful, but I cannot,' said Jameson.

'Another time ... Just give my wife that message,' Roger said to the girl, and rang off. He stood up, walked to the window and looked out on to the river. He remembered crossing the bridge last night, and seeing the lights reflected in just the same way as now. He turned again as Jameson stood up. 'I'll call Soames of *The Globe* and tell him, but I won't release the story generally until I've had a word with Mr Hardy. Will that suit your people?'

'I am sure it will,' approved Jameson. 'What time will you be able to work on this case tomorrow, Mr West?'

'Let's say ten o'clock.'

'I will be here, or I will send a message. Goodnight.' Jameson went out, backing from the door and closing it quietly. Everything he did was quiet and deliberate.

Roger squatted on the side of the desk and asked the operator for *The Globe*. He wondered if Faith would answer him, and as the thought entered his mind his heart began to beat faster than usual, and the very fact made him angry. There were a lot of noises on the line – this was one of the busiest times for a newspaper which was just going to bed.

'Mr Soames's office.' Whoever it was, it wasn't the old man's niece.

'Ask him to speak to me at once,' Roger said. 'This is Superintendent West ... Hallo, Mr Soames ... Yes, she looked after me very well, thanks ... Yes, it's still off the record, but I have something else you can use if you want to. It won't be released for some time to the other newspapers, not in time to use in the morning's editions, anyhow. Ready?'

'Ready for some catch,' Soames said. 'You don't hand out scoops for nothing.'

So he had no idea of what was to come.

Roger wished he could be in the office to see the old man's

face as the story was told. Instead, he had to guess the way the thick lips tightened, just as they did when Soames moved and his joints hurt him. The silence lasted for a long time, so the shock effect was probably very great.

At last, the response came. In a harsh voice which sounded as if it was some distance from the mouthpiece, Soames said:

'They say they found diamonds in Nightingale's baggage?'

'Yes.'

'I wonder if they did, or whether they're lying.'

'If the Pretoria police tell me that they found diamonds in his baggage, then I believe them,' Roger said flatly. 'There's no point in evading the issue. If they say he was travelling with a false passport, I believe that too. Did he often use a false passport?'

Soames didn't answer.

Roger said gruffly: 'If he did and you knew about it, you were asking for trouble. I haven't been able to talk to Hardy yet – that's why I haven't released this. Pretoria's left it to us. All they ask for is simultaneous release. That's fair enough.'

'Yes.' Soames still sounded a long way from the mouthpiece; it would be easy to believe that he was too shocked to grasp all the implications of the situation But in fact he wasn't, for he went on: 'I'll send someone out to Pretoria to talk to them and to interview Nightingale. You can tell your fine friends that if they don't let us talk to him we'll make a bigger song and dance than they've heard for a long time.'

'Soames,' Roger said, 'why don't you accept the fact that one of your employees acting on your behalf and with your knowledge has got himself into serious trouble? What you want from Pretoria are concessions, and if you write or say anything to put their backs up you can't blame them if they turn nasty. Will you use the story in the morning?'

'I'll print it,' Soames growled. 'I won't make much comment. Thanks for all you've done. I appreciate it.' When he rang off, it was easy to imagine him dropping back into his

chair, grunting, staring under his bushy brows at the wall in front of him.

Nothing else came in.

Roger went downstairs, and found his car without anything parked within yards of it. Two or three men said goodnight and he nodded mechanically, for he was so preoccupied about the new situation and the possibility that he would be sent to South Africa. Between now and the time Hardy was told about this, he had to make up his own mind whether he thought it would be the right thing to do; it would be right only if it seemed likely to bring the inquiry to a quicker end.

Nightingale was a key witness; obviously it was essential to talk to the newspaperman, and equally Pretoria couldn't be expected to release a suspect against whom there was so much evidence.

Roger drove out on to the Embankment and past the Houses of Parliament, along the Embankment at Millbank. There was very little traffic, nothing remotely like the nightmare of the morning, and he was home in ten minutes. Richard's battered green MG stood outside the house, but the garage entrance was clear. Roger drove in, but didn't close the doors; Richard would do that – or Scoop, if he didn't walk dreamily past without noticing they were open. Roger went round the back way, and heard Richard's deep, very pleasant voice, saying something which he couldn't catch. Janet laughed. Richard made some retort and Janet's laughter became deeper. Roger opened the kitchen door, to hear Richard say:

'It's fantastic! There am I, sitting in state, with my name on the door, and except for the really big shots, everyone taps before they come in.' The lad was standing by the larder, and tapping the door lightly. Suddenly his tone of voice altered and he declaimed: '*Come in* ... And I'm banging away on the typewriter so I just wave them to wait ... Then whoever it is says "Squire" – they all call me Squire these days; it's a studio joke. And the really funny thing was this morning. Someone tapped, so I did my stuff and rattled away a letter and then turned round – and Harry

was standing watching me, looking like a statue Harry my boss! I couldn't tell whether he was amused or not, until I realized he must have been pulling my leg, or he wouldn't have tapped ... Why, hallo Dad!'

'Roger!' exclaimed Janet. 'I didn't hear you.'

'Go on, Fish,' said Roger.

'I've finished, really,' said Richard hastily. He was tall, nice-looking in a lean-faced way, had a good colour, and dark curly hair. In that second Roger saw Faith as if she were standing beside the boy, and wondered how they would get on together. Richard-sometimes-called-Fish was now twenty, and he looked two or three years over his age sometimes. He had fallen on his feet in a studio near Watford, and was working with the script supervisor on a police series for television: 'Harry' was his chief, for whom he had formed a great admiration. 'Harry just started calling me "Squire", that was all. ...'

Soon, Roger asked: 'How's work going?'

'Pretty well, I should think. I've started on a scene in a script, goodness knows whether it's what Harry wants, but I think it's better than the last one which he said was nbg. Only he didn't put it quite like that! I say, I promised to go and collect Scoop from that lecture. I'll be seeing you.'

Richard went out of the house like a rocket, and soon the engine of his car snorted. Janet was putting cold ham, pork-pie, pickles, bread, butter, and cheese on the kitchen table, while Roger rinsed his hands and face at the kitchen-sink. Roger tucked in as they talked about the trivial things of the day. Janet looked tired, he thought, and when tired she almost looked her age. There was a remoteness about her which Roger had noticed recently, as if she found it difficult to think about what they were saying, and everything she said came off the surface of her mind. The only real warmth in her voice came when she talked of the boys.

'I feel so tired,' she said about ten o'clock. 'I think I'll have an early night, darling.'

Roger thought: I'm out night after night, and here's one when I'm home and she feels too tired to stay up. It was not a very deep reflection, and when she had gone upstairs he put

it out of his mind. He took her some tea and they had it together. By eleven o'clock Janet was dozing off; Roger felt sure that she was asleep almost before he closed the door. She must be tired out. He hoped Hardy wouldn't telephone too soon, and disturb her, and he hoped Hardy wouldn't telephone too late; that would break right across her sleep It was one of those nights when anyone from the Yard or any hopeful newspaperman might call.

He looked through the documents in his briefcase, making sure that every case he had been working on was annotated so that whoever took it over would have the full picture. This took him until half past eleven. The boys weren't in; next thing he knew, they would telephone to say they would be late.

In fact they arrived just after midnight, big-eyed with the kind of tiredness which youth would never admit. As always Richard had coasted the MG the last fifty yards, and they came in, closing the back door quietly.

'Mum gone to bed?' asked Richard.

'Yes. Does she usually go so early?'

'Most nights,' answered Scoop, and added in one of his devastating moments of frankness: 'After all she would only get bored, sitting up and waiting for you. I say, Dad, what happened at Cannon Row this morning? The newspapers say you tried to save the man who was shot.'

'The newspapers which say that are simply guessing,' Roger declared 'I didn't have any warning, and I don't think anyone would have been able to save him. Did your mother say much about it?'

'Just read the story in the *Evening News*, but didn't say a word,' Martin answered He usually arrived back from the College of Art before Richard came in from the studio, and was always better informed about events at home.

'Had any luck?' asked Richard. He was opening the refrigerator door and taking out milk and a chunk of the pork-pie. 'I mean, made any more arrests?'

'Not just yet,' Roger said drily.

He left them, went into the front room, poured himself a whisky and soda, and looked through the morning and

evening newspapers. The boys poked their heads in, whispered goodnight, and went upstairs; a door banged. There was no creaking sound from Janet above his head, and as he sat back in the easy chair Roger wished he could go up to bed. He was more than tired enough, but if he was in bed and Hardy telephoned it was bound to wake Janet. Here, the telephone was at his side. He folded up the newspapers, and picked up the skeleton plans, checking how much he knew by heart. As he did so, the telephone bell rang; he snatched the receiver off almost before it had finished its first ring.

'West.'

'You asked me to call you,' Hardy said.

'Sorry to worry you,' said Roger. 'Something's cropped up you ought to know about.' He told the Assistant Commissioner exactly what had happened, and also told him of Soames's reaction, and of what he, Roger, had done.

'Better release the story generally,' decided Hardy. 'I'll talk to Sharp tonight He can cable Pretoria and tell them what we're going to do and then we can tell the Back-Room Inspector to release it here.'

'Sure you wouldn't like me to do that?'

'Yes, I'm sure.' After a pause, Hardy went on: 'When can you be ready to go?'

Roger's heart began to thump.

'Go where?'

'You know where. The quicker you can see Nightingale and find out what he's really up to, the better. He probably won't talk to the South African police. If he won't talk to you we'll know he's deep in the smuggling,' guessed Hardy. 'Haven't you checked what flights there are to Johannesburg tomorrow?'

'No,' said Roger,

'You're slipping,' Hardy said. 'Why don't you check with London Airport, and then tell Sharp to get you fixed up?'

# 15

# *FLIGHT*

'WOULD YOU like to come to the airport?' Roger asked Janet. In the past she had been to see him off on long trips abroad, and had always given him the impression that she liked to. This morning, he wasn't sure what her reaction would be. He had told her what Hardy wanted him to do, that there was a BOAC flight to Johannesburg direct at one-thirty that afternoon, which meant that he would be able to spend all the morning at the Yard. When Janet didn't answer now, he went on almost awkwardly: 'Jan, what's the matter?'

'Nothing's the matter.'

'I have to go, you know.'

'I know.'

'Are you coming to see me off?'

'If you want me to.'

Her eyes were lack-lustre where they should be so bright, her manner was almost listless where it was usually brisk and lively. He did not know what to do or say, but he did know that they were expecting him at the Yard and every minute he could spend there would be precious.

'Will you pack a few things for me? I'll call for you at half past twelve,' he said. He wished there was time to suggest that he should come home earlier so that they could have lunch at the airport, but if he promised that and something cropped up to prevent it she would be disappointed. It was better not to risk it. 'How does that sound?'

Janet hesitated; and then she forced a smile and put some enthusiasm into her voice.

'That sounds fine! Now you'd better be off, or you'll be late. You'll need every minute you can squeeze in this morning.' She gave him a peck of a kiss, and shooed him off, but

there was something not quite normal about it; she had to make the special effort. He was preoccupied as he drove to the Yard, and whenever he tried to make himself think of the smuggling case, uncertainty about Janet drew his thoughts back to her. Now that he had noticed this remoteness, he realized that it had been gradually developing for some time – certainly for months. And it was a fact that he had spent more and more time at the office in the evening, doing paper-work which never seemed to end, so that he could carry out the actual work of investigation during the day. It had become a habit, he was so deeply involved in his job; could one say that he was obsessed by it?

He turned into the Yard, to find Gorlay waiting, obviously to look after the car.

'Everything all right?' Roger asked.

'Nothing new as far as I know,' said Gorlay. 'Mr Klemm and Mr McKay have been in since seven, to get everything ready before you go.'

Roger said, startled: 'How do they know I'm going anywhere?'

Gorlay grinned: 'Little bird I suppose, sir!'

Roger laughed, and hurried up the steps. There seemed a greater briskness about most of the people whom he saw on the way. He reached his own office to find everything cleared from his desk except the papers and reports on the smuggling investigation, and also to find a clearly marked list of everything that had been done, and every letter posted, last night. He smiled with satisfaction as he rang for Klemm and McKay, who came in together so quickly that it was obvious that they had been waiting for the summons. Klemm looked bright-eyed, McKay a little tired, but Yard men were used to working through the night and snatching sleep whenever they could.

'Anything new?' Roger asked.

'One thing,' answered Klemm. 'We've had a visit from a taxi-driver – the chap who delivered Van der Lunn to the Common View Hotel. He says that someone paid him a couple of pounds to take the man there, and told him that

Van der Lunn was drunk. Most cabbies get that kind of job. He didn't think anything of it until he saw the description of the motor-scooterist who drove Bradshaw's murderer away.'

Roger asked sharply: 'Same man?'

'The cabby says so.'

'Where'd he pick the passenger up?'

'At the corner of Great Compton Street and Frith Street, but we had a bit of luck.' Klemm looked almost smug. 'The cabby had been round the block, looking for a fare, and had noticed the Italian and the so-called drunk leaving the Seven Seas strip club. He'd seen the Italian before, and swears it was Severini or Galli. The description fits either of them.'

Roger said: 'Better double the watch on that club, though; the manager might know more than he admits.'

'We'll look after this end,' Klemm assured him confidently, and McKay chimed in with a subdued, 'Aye.' Then Klemm went on: 'I've talked to our man at the hospital. Van der Lunn hasn't come round enough to speak yet, and the surgeon says that with the dope they've pumped into him it will certainly be forty-eight hours, and probably a week, before he can tell us anything.'

'What we need is another break,' Roger said. 'You heard about Nightingale?'

'Jameson told us. Bloody fool to go in with a faked passport,' said Klemm. 'Any idea why he did it?'

'I hope to find out tomorrow,' said Roger. 'Now, let's go over the drill for while I'm away. I'll need a detailed report by cable or telephone once a day – find out from Jameson or someone at the South Africa Embassy the best time to get through to Johannesburg. I'd like cabled confirmation on all the salient points and an airmail letter with more details every day. Start telephoning the European police tomorrow. And as the replies come in from our questionnaire, I'd like copies by airmail with word by telephone if you think it's urgent enough. All clear?'

'No trouble,' said Klemm.

'Wouldn't be a bad idea to work from this office while I'm

gone, but you'll be out on your necks the moment I'm back.' They laughed. 'Anything in about David Bradshaw?'

'All the reports we've had from people who knew him pretty well corroborate the story from Common View Hotel,' answered McKay. 'Except for one thing.'

'What thing?'

'He liked leg and strip shows. Some of the places he visited on flights were very spicy and expensive, from Cairo to Istanbul and Singapore to Hong Kong. There isna' much doubt that the man had exotic and expensive tastes, and the Seven Seas Club was the kind of place he could get what he wanted.'

Roger said softly: 'Let's go.'

* * *

The manager was tall, lean, hungry looking; his secretary somewhat like a Sunday school teacher who had lost her faith. They were in a small, messy office behind the main room of the club, where the chairs were standing on the tables, cleaners went about their work sluggishly, a Negro barman was busy polishing glasses and dusting bottles A band of three middle aged men and a youthful one were rehearsing a new number on the little stage, and the booming of the drum was very loud even in the office. Boom ... Boom ... Boom ... Boom ...

Roger thrust photographs of Nightingale and Van der Lunn in front of the manager and the woman

'Yes, we were shown those last night, and we've made investigations,' the hungry looking manager said hurriedly. 'They were here on Monday night, both of them. So was the man I was asked about yesterday, the man with the big nose.'

'David Bradshaw,' Roger said.

'Yes, sir. We recognized him from his photograph. What a terrible thing to happen! And in a police-station!' The man seemed too nervous and edgy to mean that maliciously. 'He was often here, sir. He spent a lot of money, he really was a big spender. But that other man, he didn't spend much.' He pointed to Nightingale's photograph. 'He has been here

several times, and I can tell you this, he was usually here when Brad – *Brad*shaw was. No, he didn't spend much, but Bradshaw spent hundreds of pounds some evenings ...'

. . .

'What we want is a team to visit banks in the West End area to find out if Bradshaw had accounts with them under different names,' Roger decided. 'And if we can't get any results from the West End, spread the inquiries farther. At the hotel he didn't look as if he had two pennies to rub together, but if he spent money like water at the Seven Seas, he got it from somewhere and maybe he keeps it safely in a bank.'

'We'll fix it,' Klemm promised. His eyes were very bright. 'My God, what a case this is!'

. . .

When Roger returned to his office, he found an envelope marked BOAC on the desk. Inside was his return ticket, the return date open, labels, some brochures about South Africa including the game parks, embarkation instructions, and 'Notes of Interest to Passengers'. There was also a note from Hardy, wishing him luck: Hardy was at the Police Conference in the City.

It was a little after twelve o'clock when BOAC telephoned.

'The flight has been put back by one hour, sir. If you care to reach the airport at two-thirty instead of one-thirty that will be in ample time.'

'Ah,' said Roger. 'Thanks.' He put in a call to Janet immediately, and when she answered he spoke with a lilt in his voice which he hoped would bring back an answering response. 'Hallo, sweet! The flight's been put back an hour; we've time to lunch together at the airport restaurant. How about it?'

He was half afraid that she would make some excuse.

'Oh, that's wonderful!' Janet exclaimed.

. . .

There was still a hint of remoteness when they had lunch

together. She had packed everything Roger needed, done everything she could, yet she was holding something back. There was a kind of constraint between them even when they said goodbye Roger had the impression there was something she wanted to say, but could not bring herself to say it.

Hammerton and Jameson were there to see him off at the aircraft itself, and the last face Roger saw out of the window was that of the Negro, smiling his almost wistful smile.

. . .

Roger found the fascination of the sun glistening on the snow clad Alps, the beauty of the valleys, the smallness of the towns and villages, the vivid blue of the Mediterranean, as great as ever. The flight over the Mediterranean was so uneventful that it was almost humdrum, but when the mosques and towers of Cairo loomed up, and the fantastic labyrinth of tiny streets slashed here and there by great boulevards, there was a surge of excitement. But they landed too soon. A few passengers got off, two Egyptians and a big Rhodesian got on. They were off in an hour, catching a glimpse of the Nile with its green strips of land on either side, before darkness fell, and the sky was filled with stars of unbelievable brilliance. Roger dozed, had a whisky-and-soda, chatted with a middle-aged passenger across the gang way, ordered a mixed grill, and was waited on as attentively as any VIP From time to time he glanced through the booklet, which described the land over which they were flying Down there, hidden by the night, was the Valley of the Nile, the Valley of Kings, the magnificence of Luxor, and the sand of the unending desert.

He dozed off.

When he woke, the stewardess was shaking his shoulder.

'Some tea, sir, we'll soon be at Nairobi.' As he sat up, she added: 'Mount Kenya's looking magnificent this morning.'

The sun, rising out of the dark earth into a clear, pale sky shone on the snow capped peak, giving it a breathtaking beauty.

There was the usual tension as they went down at Nairobi,

the release from it as the aircraft stopped, then the bustle of passengers getting out and others getting on. Out of Nairobi, they flew over scrub, then over thick jungle, soon over a rock-strewn land. The great Rift Valley looked as if it was something in a relief map, not part of the earth.

The two stewards were younger men than Bradshaw, attentive and pleasant; one of the three stewardesses reminded Roger slightly of Faith Soames.

After breakfast, he tried to think only of the problem ahead. He did not know Nightingale well, but knew him for a strong-willed individual with a one-track mind, or what Soames believed was a one track mind, for his job. Roger made himself go over everything that had happened and the reports he had read, checking and rechecking, until he felt sure that he knew all the salient points, and was not likely to need to refresh himself with his papers. Once convinced of that, he was able to relax enough to study the passenger's booklet, in which were details of the countries they were flying over, the names of tribes, the kinds of wild animals, and the minerals being mined. Kilimanjaro stood out among the mountains of Kenya, the most breathtaking sight they had seen since Switzerland.

The steward and the stewardesses kept pointing out places of interest in the browny-yellow countryside. For the most part it was broken by ranges of hills, wild and desolate, and twice crossed by great rivers. There was a stirring of excitement when someone exclaimed: 'Look, Kariba!' Suddenly everyone was craning his neck to look out of the tiny windows.

The stewardess who looked like Faith stopped by Roger, and his middle-aged neighbour.

'You'll soon get a good view of it,' she said.

On the north side there was a great sheet of water where the river was dammed, on the south only a trickle. The great wall of the dam was so massive that it was almost as impressive as the Zambesi itself.

Then suddenly, the dam was behind them, and scrub-covered countryside stretched out below, horizon to horizon, trees with tiny leaves that seemed to be only brown or yel-

low, or the stripped branches of bushes, here and there a huge baobab tree jutting out with its rock-like trunk and its pathetic, stunted limbs.

The middle-aged man said suddenly: 'There's the Limpopo. Now we won't be long. Sluggish-looking stretch of mud, isn't it?'

Very soon they were flying over the hills of Northern Transvaal, seeing mine dumps dotted about everywhere. 'Gold, copper, platinum, and uranium among others,' said the booklet.

Soon they could see Pretoria with its wide streets and tall modern buildings and the stark solidness of the Voortrekker Monument, memorial to the pioneers who had opened up this great land in their search for freedom from British domination. Almost at once the skyscrapers of Johannesburg appeared, and beyond there seemed yellow hills, the slag heaps of the gold-mines, drab and unromantic from the air.

All these things Roger had learned in his youth, and had read about countless times. He had refreshed his memory about most of them on the aircraft, and everything he saw seemed to have its special interest and significance.

'Fasten your belts, please' The stewardesses called out, then checked each belt. The light showed outside the cockpit, and the *No Smoking* order was flashed on Routine. Roger saw the flat ground as it appeared to rise up to meet the aircraft, had a familiar moment of anxiety, then felt the gentle bump, another and another; and they were down.

The stewardess who had been so solicitous came up

'You're to go off first, Mr West. I hope you enjoyed your journey.'

'Very much,' said Roger. He got out of his seat and smiled at her. 'Thanks largely to you.' She looked pleased. The pilot came hurrying from the door which had been closed most of the flight, and reached the head of the steps just behind Roger.

'Glad to have met you, Superintendent – always good to have celebrities aboard.'

Roger chuckled as he shook hands.

'I don't know what the blarney is about, but thanks.' He started down the steps and saw two men moving towards him from a dark-blue Chevrolet with a coloured chauffeur standing by it. Both were in a pale brown uniform which looked as if it were made of linen or drill; he thought at first that they were soldiers, then remembered that the South African police wore uniforms like this.

They drew up, and the elder of the two, in his fifties, shook hands.

'Superintendent West?'

'Yes.'

'I am Colonel Wiess. This is Captain Standish. We are very glad to make your acquaintance and grateful that you have come so promptly.'

Both men had powerful handshakes. Wiess spoke rather like du Toit, but with a harder voice; Standish had an ordinary English voice with a slight twang in it; he had a broad, very tanned face and his blue eyes had the bright clarity of periwinkles. Wiess was rather more florid, rather more fleshy.

Wiess was saying: 'We have heard much about you, of course, even before this investigation. We hope you will call on us for anything you need while you are in South Africa.'

'I certainly will,' said Roger.

They whisked him through Customs. A boy wearing a khaki shirt and khaki shorts carried his two bags, and would have taken his briefcase had he not held on to it. His first impression was of a vast, vivid blue sky, and of a heat which seemed to strike at him. The shade of the Customs house had been welcome. Now he stepped out of that shade into the open air outside the shed, and walked towards the car only a short distance away. The driver stood at attention, smart in a closed-neck jacket and a topee, which was a cross between khaki and grey. He opened the doors. The officers got in the back, where there was plenty of room for all three. The driver drove off smoothly.

'We are at the Jan Smuts International Airport,' Wiess said. 'It serves both Johannesburg, to the south, and Pre-

toria, to the north. We shall be in Pretoria in about half an hour.'

At some cross roads, a Bantu constable on point duty held up a low-lying red sports car to allow them to pass. Only as they turned to the right, away from the sports car, did Roger see the driver.

It was Faith Soames.

## 16

## *REMINDER*

ROGER SAW Faith smiling, as if she was mocking him; and then she disappeared. Wiess looked at him questioningly, and Standish, who had been on the side near the girl, raised one eyebrow, as if to say: 'We have a ladies' man.' Neither South African spoke. A few cars and some trucks passed them. Perhaps it was because there were so many Jamaicans in London, but the fact that there were so many dark skins here was hardly noticeable.

'If you will tell us what you would like to do first,' Wiess said, 'we will arrange it. Let me say at once that we placed James Nightingale under arrest with the greatest reluctance and only when we were sure that the evidence was very strong. We do not wish to arouse the antagonism of any section of the British Press for the sake of it.'

'I know what you mean,' said Roger. 'Did you see the girl in the red Jaguar?'

'No,' said Wiess.

'Yes,' said Standish.

'She's here from *The Globe*,' Roger told them. 'I saw her in London the evening before last, so she must have caught a plane that night. *The Globe* isn't losing much time.' He told them more about Faith and more about Nightingale, and added: 'If Soames is sure that this is a justifiable charge, he won't try to be spiteful. All he wants is what we want.

the truth.' He felt almost pompous as he uttered the words, but neither of the others appeared to notice it. 'How much hotter does it get?' he inquired.

'This is not what we consider a hot day,' said Wiess. 'And when you are a little more used to it I do not believe that you will find it unpleasant. You were going to tell me what you would like to do first.'

Roger thought: He's not going to waste any time, either. He had a feeling that Standish was watching him more critically than Wiess was. It would be easy to say he would like a general picture of the situation first, but probably better if he had a specific request. He could see Nightingale almost at once, and let Wiess have a copy of all the details of the Klemm-McKay plan. They were both waiting on him.

'I'd like a thorough briefing on the case against Nightingale, and then I'd like to see him. If he's involved in the smuggling, we can get a lead through him, if he isn't we have to try and find out what's been happening. He may have some information that would help us.'

'If you can believe what he says,' said Standish.

'You don't believe him, do you?'

'No,' said Standish.

'Captain Standish does not want to allow the benefit of the doubt,' said Wiess. 'I think we have to accept the possibility that Nightingale is innocent of any major crime although undoubtedly guilty of breaking some of our laws.'

'Using a false passport would get him in trouble at any frontier,' Roger said. 'Who's in charge of the case against him?'

'I am, under Colonel Wiess,' answered Standish.

'And I am in charge of investigations into the diamond smuggling,' Wiess said. 'I am sure you are right, you should deal with Nightingale first, and we should go on from there. Superintendent, would you prefer to be the private guest of a senior officer, or would you prefer to be in a hotel?'

'A hotel, I think,' Roger said, half apologetically.

Standish gave a twisted kind of smile. Roger wished that he had taken to the man, and wondered if Standish had

any bee in his bonnet or had any sense of grievance against the Yard. There was certainly something in his manner which Roger did not like.

'We have provisionally reserved a suite for you at the New Pretoria Hotel,' said Wiess. 'It is close to our new Police Headquarters, and convenient for the centre of the city. We have arranged for you to be able to call on a secretary, and if you need personal assistants Captain Standish will arrange whatever is necessary. Will you forgive me if I ask one favour?'

'Of course,' Roger said mechanically.

'Our ways and our methods are not always the same as yours, and I will be grateful if you do not take any course of action without first consulting Captain Standish or me. It is not that I believe you would do so without good reason, but it could give rise to misunderstanding and it could also cause delays and possibly cause harm.' Wiess was looking straight at Roger as he spoke, matter-of-fact in manner and yet obviously determined that he should be taken seriously.

'Colonel,' Roger said with equal bluntness, 'I shan't throw my weight about.'

Before Wiess could comment or Standish react in any way, there was a red flash on the road, and the scarlet Jaguar passed them on the wide dual carriageway; it must have been travelling at ninety miles an hour. Faith was driving with that kind of self confidence given to few women, but when given, as effective as any man's. She disappeared round a curve.

Soon they were in the outskirts of the city, driving along a tree-lined road with good-class houses on either side. They passed a number of garages and beneath an underpass, then they seemed to be in the middle of a bustling, thriving metropolis.

Five minutes later, Roger was in his hotel.

The manager was present to receive the party. Three white clad boys stood in attendance. Signing in was quite a ceremony. There were a few formal words of welcome, and then they went up in a lift which might have been in the hotel of any American city. The place was streamlined and

ultramodern, the passages very wide, and the muted strains of piped music made a pleasant background of sound. The manager unlocked the door of Number 505, near the lift, and led the way into a large room furnished in contemporary style, with grey venetian blinds at the enormously wide window. There were two telephones, two desks, all the comfort he could imagine – there was even a dictaphone.

'I shall leave a sergeant downstairs and he will bring you to Police Headquarters whenever you are ready. We shall have Nightingale there,' Wiess added. 'If you require anything, please ring the bell or telephone.'

'*Anything*,' Standish echoed, and there seemed to be a suggestive note in his voice.

They went out, and almost as soon as the door closed there was a tap at it. A boy whose dark face and arms showed jet black against his snow-white jacket and short trousers, stood there holding a tea-tray.

'For you, baas,' he said, and smiled almost enough to split his face in two.

'That's just what I wanted,' Roger said 'Put it on the table.' There was a long coffee-table by the window. 'Can you pull up those blinds?'

'Sure thing, baas.' The boy went across and drew them up without effort, locked them by pulling the cord diagonally away from the top, then moved away. 'I am your special room-boy, baas. Anything you want, just send for me. I will be in the passage, always ready.'

'What's your name?' asked Roger.

'Percival, baas.'

Percival went out, closing the door quietly. Roger looked out on to the wide street. Opposite there was another high, modern building with the word *Volksbank* on it, and some magnificent statuary of animals at the massive front steps. The rest of the buildings in sight seemed old-fashioned The pavements were crowded, but motor traffic was not very dense.

Roger turned away and opened the file which Wiess had given him about Nightingale, poured out tea, and began to read and to drink. He had been there for five minutes, al-

ready half forgetting the journey, when there was another tap at the door. He called:

'Come in.'

Once again it was Percival, still beaming all over his face, perhaps more nervous than he appeared to be. He carried a silver dish with half a dozen cream *éclairs* on it, brought them in swinging a silver handle, and declared:

'I'm very sorry, baas, I forgot the very nice cakes.' He put them down, backed away and went out.

Roger finished his first cup of tea, looked at the tempting cakes, and then noticed a small envelope underneath one of them. He picked this up. It was plain, probably a goodwill message from the police or the hotel, he imagined, and opened it. Inside was a single fold of paper, and on it a single question. *Who do the cakes remind you of?*

So Faith Soames was in the hotel, already casting her spell over the staff.

. . .

Roger had a shave and a shower, changed into a lightweight pale-brown suit which he had worn when he had been to Australia in the summer, and felt fresh and ready to tackle even Standish and Nightingale when he went out. Percival had already taken out the tray. No one had called him, although he would not have been surprised to have a call from the newspapers. He moved slowly into the carpeted stealth of the passages, and pressed the bell for the lift. It was automatic, but a boy in a puce-coloured uniform and wearing a white fez-type cap was in attendance, he also wore enormous white gloves. In the foyer, a Bantu police sergeant in starch-stiffened uniform, buttoned up jacket and topee like the driver's, came towards him and saluted.

'I am Sergeant Horo, sir. You wish to visit the Police Headquarters now?'

'Yes, please.'

'You go by car, sir, or you walk?'

'I'll walk,' decided Roger.

They left the hotel, waited by some traffic lights with a crowd of white people and coloured people who seemed as

oblivious of one another as in any crowd, and went across on the green, passed rows of parked cars and windows crammed with goods, turned a corner and then another corner and came upon the Police Headquarters, a long, low modern building. Police were on duty outside, as they would be at the Yard. The reception office had obviously been warned to expect him, and Horo led the way up one flight of stairs and then along to a room with *Colonel Wiess* printed in black on the door. The sergeant tapped, turned the handle, stood aside, saluted, and announced:

'Superintendent West, Colonel.'

Wiess was alone, and Roger had the impression that he was more preoccupied than he had been in the car. He shrugged his preoccupation off, however, pointed to a chair, and said:

'I have read your report closely, Superintendent, and there is nothing about it with which I disagree. You make me feel almost hopeful of reaching a solution before long. Before you see Nightingale, I would like to make a few remarks.'

'Of course,' Roger said.

'There is some apparent connection between Mr Van der Lunn's movements and Nightingale's, and it is clear that you do not regard them as coincidental. I confess I hope they are, but I agree that they may not be. Mr Van der Lunn has the confidence of the Government, and I find it almost impossible to believe that he would act at any time contrary to the Government's interest. I should perhaps say the country's interest. Have you any reason to believe that I am wrong?'

'Not yet,' Roger said. 'I don't know how big the job is, but I can't see a man in Van der Lunn's position finding it worth it.'

'I am glad you feel like that,' said Wiess. 'It is not possible to value the amount involved for certain. It is a large sum, but not large by Van der Lunn's standards.'

'How large?' inquired Roger.

'We have been asked forty-one times for proof that packets of diamonds shipped from this country actually left. In each case, we can offer proof that the diamonds were in-

spected visually by our Customs officers. The average value of each packet was twenty thousand rands.'

Startled, Roger said: 'Twenty thousand rands equals ten thousand pounds sterling. That's a lot of money.'

'It is indeed.' After a pause, Wiess went on: 'Now that you have studied the reports on Nightingale – are you satisfied with what followed?'

'If I'd been in your position I would have held him,' Roger said flatly. 'What about those diamonds?'

'It is possible that he is telling the truth, and they were put in his luggage,' answered Wiess.

'So he isn't proved guilty of anything more than illegal entry.'

'In this country that is a more serious offence than it might be in others, but I seem to remember certain incidents where you have received illegal immigrants and refused to allow them to stay.' There was no smile and no edge to his voice as he said that. 'I think we shall have to be convinced very strongly that Mr Nightingale's presence is in the country's interests. But I keep an open mind. He is now downstairs, in a cell. Would you prefer to see him there, or would you like him to be in a waiting-room?'

'I'll see him in the cell,' Roger decided.

## 17

## *NIGHTINGALE*

ROGER HAD forgotten that Nightingale was so tall: an inch taller than he, Roger, which made him six foot two or three. He was broad but spare; if anything, too thin. His cheeks were slightly hollow, while his square chin was very bony. He had close cropped brown hair, with plenty of peppering and salting, an older man than Roger had thought, too, certainly in his middle forties. Because of the leanness of his features he had a rather gaunt look, but that

was relieved by the mobility of his lips and the brightness of his fine grey eyes, with clearly defined eyebrows and long lashes. There was something very striking about him, and the word which sprang to Roger's mind was 'buccaneering'. Piratical, in fact; and the way he had blustered into South Africa with the false passport suggested that his temperament matched his appearance. Piratical, Roger thought again the classic smuggler Did this impression affect Wiess or Standish in their attitudes?

The cell was much more modern than any at Scotland Yard or Cannon Row, shiny with fresh paint, quite comfortable with a padded seat chair and a single bed, a wash basin, a partitioned-off WC. Nightingale was facing the door of the cell as the lieutenant-in charge of cells unlocked it. Two other policemen were at hand, and these men were armed Roger remembered what had happened to David Bradshaw when he had visited him in his cell. He shivered.

Nightingale, who had been sitting on the bed reading a heavy book, still held it It had a red, white, and blue cover. He watched while the door was opened and Roger stepped inside, but he didn't move back, which meant that they had to stand close together.

The door clanged behind them, and keys jangled.

'So the Yard sent its glamour boy,' Nightingale jeered. 'I'm flattered.'

'You don't have to think about being flattered. You have to wonder how long you're going to spend behind bars,' Roger said sharply.

'You, too?' That was a sneer.

'Me, too, what?'

'Like these gentry, presume me guilty in the hope that I can never prove my innocence.'

'You can't prove you didn't have a false passport.'

'Oh, that.' Nightingale shrugged 'You can't even begin to know the problems of a newspaperman - there's always some flare-up where they crack down on the Press, hold 'em at frontiers and airports So I have a spare one.' He grinned fiercely 'I didn't think the South African Government would want me around, but I should have known I'd be recognized.

I was in a hurry, so I took a chance. When are you going to get me out?'

'You can get one thing clear from the start,' Roger said. 'I'm not here to look after your interests, that's up to Soames and your newspaper. I'm here to find out whether you can help us solve a series of serious crimes which now includes murder and kidnapping. If you co operate it should make your own lawyer's task easier. If you're stubborn or awkward you'll make it worse, because already you look as guilty as hell.'

Nightingale backed a pace.

'You're a straightforward bastard, anyhow.' His tone changed only a little. He threw the book on to the bed and it fell so that when Roger glanced at it the title was easy to read: *A Start in Freedom*, by Sir Hugh Foot Somehow it seemed logical that Nightingale should read a book about colour and race problems in his present predicament: it was a form of defiance. 'What kind of confession do you want?'

'Full, free, and fast,' said Roger. He moved to the bed and sat down, he was feeling irritated by this man, and Standish had already put him on edge 'I've been through all the statements you've made, all the statements made by everyone at the Customs office, and by the police after they questioned you and searched your luggage. They say you were present when the bag of industrial diamonds was found - were you?'

'Yes.'

'And you hadn't seen it before?'

'That's what my statement says.'

'Try telling me,' Roger said. He leaned back against the wall, narrowing his eyes, but soon wished he hadn't sat down because in a way it put him at a disadvantage. 'We probably speak the same kind of language. Did you know the diamonds were in your baggage?'

'I did not.'

'Have you any idea who put them there?'

'Some Customs bastard, probably.'

Roger said, quietly, firmly: 'Now you know as well as I do

that you're talking nonsense. Go on like it, and I'll have to regard you as hostile and a suspect. I don't want to think one of Britain's best newspaper correspondents is a criminal, but after your passport trick, I'm prepared to believe it possible.' When Nightingale didn't answer, Roger repeated: 'Have you any idea who put the bag of diamonds in your baggage?'

'No.'

'Had you ever seen it before?'

'No.'

'When had you last been through your baggage?'

'In London – and it wasn't there then. Take it from me, Handsome, that bag of diamond dust was put in at London Airport or while it was on the aircraft or here in Pretoria.'

'Or at Nairobi – didn't you land there?'

Nightingale frowned. 'Or at Nairobi,' he agreed. 'Don't let's forget any place.'

'If you forget anything that could help clear you, don't expect anyone else to remember it for you. Have you ever used a false passport before to enter South Africa?'

'No,' said Nightingale; he gave the impression that he hadn't expected that question.

'How often have you been to South Africa?'

'Half a dozen times.'

'When were the others?'

'In nineteen-sixty, first. Once during the Sharpeville trouble, twice over the Mandela treason trials, and three or four times over this business.'

'On your genuine passport?'

'Yes. Your memory isn't so good, is it?' Nightingale's lips twisted sardonically.

'As a matter of fact my memory is better than average and I've spent a lot of time in the last twenty-four hours taking a refresher course on the questions I'm asking you. And there are a lot of things I remember which I don't like about the situation. The last time I questioned a man in a police-cell, for instance, he was shot dead in front of my eyes.'

There was no doubt about Nightingale's reaction to that; he was astounded. He backed a pace, knocked against a

chair, and then slowly lowered himself to it. His eyes were first very rounded, rather like Scoop's, and then slowly narrowed, as the truth began to seep into his mind Before he spoke he put his hand to his pocket and drew out a packet of cigarettes, so the police were not making things too difficult for him. He took out a book of matches, too, and lit a cigarette.

'Who?' he asked.

'An acquaintance of yours.'

'Who?'

'David Bradshaw.'

Nightingale's eyes closed spasmodically, and he seemed to wince; then he kept them closed for what seemed a long time, opened them slowly, and said:

'So you know we knew each other.'

'I know you sometimes stayed at the Common View Hotel as Knight; I know you were taken to be some kind of sales representative; I know you spent a lot of time with Bradshaw at the Seven Seas Club. In fact, you'd be surprised how much I know about you where you've been, where you've reported from, most things that Soames could tell me or I could find out for myself.'

'Who shot Bradshaw?'

'A man about five feet in height who wore Italian-style clothes and shoes, had a small nose with broad nostrils, black hair which grew low down on his forehead, eyes so brown they looked black - who is he?'

Nightingale said slowly: 'I can tell you one thing about him.'

Roger felt the first surge of excitement and real hope. He believed that the newspaper correspondent was now telling the truth, that if he went on doing that he might really give some information which mattered. Roger did not prompt him. Outside, out of sight, a man walked up and down the passage; he smothered a cough.

'Bradshaw used to see this man at the Seven Seas,' Nightingale went on slowly. 'I cottoned on to Bradshaw when I was at London Airport one evening I saw him slip a packet into a porter's pocket. He collected it from the porter

after he'd been through Customs. So I followed him. He went to the Seven Seas, and left the packet at the cloakroom. Later, the Italian collected it.' Nightingale paused, then continued with a smile which made his lips go very thin. 'The same gent used to try to sell me obscene books and photographs. I wasn't in the market.'

'Do you know the man's name, what he was doing at the Seven Seas, whether he was employed there or just a customer?' Roger rapped the questions out.

'I don't know his name. He was selling smut, but I don't know what else. Women, probably. I don't think he was employed or a customer. He used to go round to a lot of Soho's nightclubs. They let him in just as Continental restaurants allow newspaper sellers in.'

Roger said: 'I can believe that, anyhow.' He took a notebook from his pocket, scribbled, and went to the bars and called: 'Excuse me.' The lieutenant in-charge came hurrying briskly, keys at the ready. 'I wonder if you would ask Captain Standish or Colonel Wiess to get that cable off at once,' he said, passing the note through the bars. 'I'll be some time yet.'

'Very good, Superintendent.'

'Thanks.' Roger moved back to Nightingale, who was beginning to smile again, although he made no comment. Roger dropped down on to the bed. 'I've told the Yard to do the rounds of the Soho strip clubs including the Seven Seas for that man,' he said. 'Did Soames know about your use of a faked passport?'

Nightingale grinned, and said: 'The prisoner refused to answer on the grounds that he might incriminate his employer.' When Roger glared at him, he went on: 'Pack it in, Handsome. It's been done a thousand times. Maybe it's a nominal offence, but it isn't as if I've ever used a faked passport when I didn't have a genuine one tucked away in case of emergency.'

'What happened to your real passport this time?'

'It was stolen — presumably at the time that the diamond packet was put in my baggage. By now the great detective ought to realize that someone has been framing the distin-

guished newspaper correspondent. That's what happened. I came here to get a story, a big story, and I did it the way I thought best. I didn't come to consort with criminals, or smuggle diamonds, or conflict with the coppers, or to write a story about the wicked Nats. Just in case you're in any doubt I don't share all Soames's political prejudices or opinions. I'm a bit *anti* civil rights if anything. I don't think a man's my equal simply because his skin's black – or yellow or white, for that matter.'

'Why come here for the story? Why not stay in London?'

'It was born here, its heart is here, and it will be solved from here.'

'Is Van der Lunn at the centre of it?'

For the second time, Roger's question caught Nightingale off his balance, and the newspaperman showed his surprise so unmistakably that there was no point in trying to pretend. He gave a slow smile, as if in reluctant approval of the question.

'It wouldn't surprise me.'

'Why did you telephone Soames about Van der Lunn and then disappear?'

'Now that's a question,' Nightingale said. 'Call it intuition. I didn't want the old man to know that I even suspected Van der Lunn was involved. Once Soames realized that the fat would be in the fire, he'd make all the news capital out of it that he could, and do everything possible to discredit a man known to be one of the non-political Nationalist hierarchy. On the other hand, if I hadn't mentioned Van der Lunn I would have got a rocket and I might even have been sacked. So I gave Soames a hint, and then followed Van der Lunn. I didn't follow him far.'

'Why did you follow him at all?'

'Because Bradshaw was fussing about him like an old hen, and the porter who'd helped Bradshaw smuggle a packet in took Van der Lunn through Customs and out to a private car. I thought it had been sent from the Embassy. My own car was impeded by a motor scooterist who swerved in front of me and then skidded – I had to find out whether he was injured. Couldn't have trailed them, anyhow; there were too

many other cars about. I lost track of Van der Lunn and had to decide what my next move would be pretty quick. I decided to come here and try to find out more about Van der Lunn's activities. While I don't share my boss's liberal prejudices, I do share his passion for a sensational story, and if I could prove that Van der Lunn was tied up in the diamond smuggling this would be one of the biggest. It wasn't any use wasting time looking for him in London, and in any case, the fact that a man on a motor scooter had side-tracked me might mean that someone was watching me in London – my interest in Van der Lunn was probably known. So I changed to my *alias*, James Knight, and caught a plane out of London the same evening - I phoned *The Globe* from the airport.'

'And Soames didn't know where you were going?'

'No.'

'You talked to your editor, and didn't think it worth reporting that you were going on a six-thousand mile flight on what might be a wild-goose chase?'

'My editor gives me a job. He doesn't tell me how to do it. He bolts me if I fall down on it, but I don't fall down very often.' Nightingale was more relaxed now than he had been since Roger had come into the cell, and he leaned back, folded his arms behind his head, rested his neck on his hands, and went on. 'That's it and all about it. I didn't get a chance of finding out what Van der Lunn gets up to in Pretoria before they caught me. I believe they guessed I'd come because of the Van der Lunn mystery, and decided to make sure I couldn't probe far. All right, all right,' Nightingale added quickly. 'I know they've legal cause. I can't plead illegal detention, but you asked me the question and I'm giving you the answer. They didn't want me to find out any more about Van der Lunn.'

After a pause, Roger said: 'So that's what you think.'

'That's what I think.'

'Let's see how good a writer you are,' said Roger. 'Put all this down on paper. Cross all the t's and dot all the i's. Don't leave anything out, whether it's about Van der Lunn or the Pretoria police, what you think of the Customs, or anything

at all. Sign it as a statement. And I'll try to get your release on the strength of it.'

Nightingale said, slowly: 'You'll do that?'

'Yes'

'I really believe you would,' said Nightingale wonderingly 'You won't get away with it, but I really believe you'll try. All right. Tell them I want some ruled paper and a ballpoint pen – and some whisky.'

## 18

## *FAIR EXCHANGE?*

As he walked up from the cells and into the main part of the building, Roger had the same impression he had at New Scotland Yard in the evening and at weekends; that everything was quiet and deserted, the affairs of the law being maintained by a skeleton staff. But Colonel Wiess was in his office, and Standish entered almost on Roger's heels. Wiess was still looking preoccupied, Standish rather tired.

Roger reported, almost *verbatim*.

'... and if he signs this statement, you think that we should take his word for it and allow him to go free,' said Wiess. 'Even if that were what I felt would be the proper course, I could not make sure that it would be done Illegal entry is a political matter as well as a police one. Certainly there would be delays.'

'You don't see what I'm driving at,' Roger said.

'Just point the way,' put in Standish.

'If Nightingale is released and allowed to move freely about South Africa he'll do one of two things. He'll try to leave the country, and you can stop him again, or he'll try to get his story. I think he'll go for his story. Some newspapermen are dedicated to getting news, and he's one of them. If he tries to investigate Van der Lunn's activities in South Africa, you can keep behind him all the time and stop him

at any stage you want. If he's mixed up in the crimes, he can't lead us to any accomplices if he's in prison, but he could if he were released.'

Wiess listened with his head raised, and his chin thrust forward; there was something basilisk about him; even predatory. He stared at Roger for a long time, then shifted his gaze to Standish.

'And what is your opinion, Captain?'

If Wiess takes Standish's advice, I'm sunk, Roger thought. But he did not look at the English-speaking police-officer, only at the Afrikaner.

'I think West has something,' Standish answered, and made Roger look round at him in surprise 'Nightingale's no use to anyone in a cell He's only an embarrassment. If we release him but hold his passport, that will be very liberal of us. If he's a crook, he could possibly give himself away. I'd let him go if he signs that statement.'

After another pause, Colonel Wiess said: 'I will have to refer the matter to the Minister of Justice, but I will recommend it I would not expect to have a decision until late tonight and perhaps tomorrow morning, Mr West I wish I could ask you to have dinner with me and my wife, but we have a preoccupation' He half smiled. 'There has been a disturbance between Indians and Bantus near Johannesburg, and the matter is urgent. I can recommend a very good restaurant.'

'And I could do with an early night,' Roger said. 'Will you let Nightingale know that the suggestion is being considered?'

'Yes, I will. And if you would like an escort back to your hotel—'

'I'd like to walk round on my own,' said Roger.

'As you wish. At least allow Captain Standish to recommend the most attractive area and the best arcades,' said Wiess.

Standish walked with Roger to a corner of Church Square, pointing out the most interesting parts of the city centre. He was obviously in a hurry, and something had made him much less sardonic. Roger wondered if the 'disturbance'

was, in fact, much more serious than Wiess had made out. He walked past shops which might have been in an English city, but every now and again came upon one which was so different that it could only be in Africa. There were not many people about, and most of the strollers were Bantu. All were in European dress. Most of them looked well kept and well-nourished. On a corner a mountainous man and a tiny, fragile wife made a chain with three children, all hand in-hand. Two girls had huge eyes and beautifully-plaited hair tied in red ribbon; the boy's head was a close crop of curls. They were all well-dressed and immaculate. Two middle-aged white women, looking shabby and untidy, looked at the children with obvious approval.

Here and there were big arcades, the shop-windows dressed almost as well as those of Burlington Arcade, and obviously cool even during the noonday heat. Now it was warm but dry and pleasant. Roger crossed where Standish had told him, and found an enormous souvenir store on a corner, with exquisite carvings of men and animals, drums, shields, spears, lion skins, zebra skins, at the back a magnificent stuffed leopard, against one wall some grotesque witch doctor masks. Janet could have spent hours there. He spent five minutes and earmarked a tall giraffe with a surprised expression as a possible gift for Janet, and a tribal mask for Scoop; he could see nothing which might appeal to Richard. He strolled back to the hotel. No one followed him, no one showed any interest in him until he neared the lift, when the sergeant who had escorted him to Police Headquarters appeared and saluted but did not speak. Roger said 'Good night,' and went up in the lift. The lift boy on duty hardly came up to his waist, and was all white teeth. Roger opened the door of his suite and went in, closed the door, and then heard a movement from inside the second room.

Alarm shot through him, touched with fear.

Before he could move, before he could even think, Faith Soames appeared in the communicating doorway.

Roger was taken completely by surprise. Obviously the girl expected him to be, and her smile showed pleasure and satisfaction. She was beautifully groomed. She wore a one-piece

dress which seemed to mould her figure, and she was fuller at the bosom than he remembered She might have been one of the leading models of London, Paris, or New York, standing with one hand on the door frame, the other on her hip, smiling; and no one could have been blamed for calling the smile inscrutable.

Roger said: 'One day you're going to grow up. How did you get in?'

'A good newspaperwoman doesn't allow locks to stop her.'

'A good newspaperman has just allowed a faked passport to stop him, and isn't enjoying the consequences. On the whole I'd say that forcing entry is a worse crime than faking a passport.'

'Are you determined to be beastly?' Faith moved slowly from her pose, and came towards him, her hands raised to her waist, the long, delicate fingers slightly curled, as if she were inviting him to move towards her. The devil of it was, he had to fight against the impulse to go forward, to take her hands, to take her in his arms Her honey-coloured eyes were bright and glowing, and he had the impression that she knew exactly what effect she was having on him.

'Faith,' he said, 'I don't know what's going on in that mind of yours, but I can tell you some things that aren't.' His mouth was dry. She was still drawing nearer, and he wanted to move back and yet wanted to go forward at the same time; either way would be to acknowledge defeat. 'Do you really want to make the situation worse for Nightingale?'

That stopped her, giving him some cause for satisfaction. The glow faded from her eyes, and her arms fell by her side.

'What do you mean?'

'I mean that whether you forced the lock, or found it open, or bribed the room-boy to let you in, the police know you're here They're watching you as well as looking after me as their guest. They know who you are and why you're here. If you start breaking their laws, they'll take it for granted that this is a conspiracy between you and Nightingale, probably with the connivance of *The Globe*. Now do you understand why I wonder what's going on in your mind? You couldn't have done a sillier thing.'

She had moved neither backwards nor forwards.

'There's one other way of looking at it,' she said flatly.

'Tell me.'

'I could have come here at your invitation.'

Roger thought: The little bitch. She was beginning to smile again, as if she knew that her comment worried him, and that once again she was in the ascendancy. He wondered whether she was really as ruthless as she tried to make out, and how much of what she said and implied was attempted bluff. The physical attraction which he had felt for her had faded, at least for the time being, and he no longer felt the urge to move forward towards her

'If they have to choose between believing you or believing me, they won't choose you,' he retorted. He moved for the first time, past her, towards the window. The venetian blinds were down again so no one could see into the room, and he wondered whether they had been lowered by the room-boy or by Faith. 'I'll tell you who could be in serious trouble.'

She had turned round, but didn't step towards him.

'Who?'

'Percival, my room-boy.'

'What makes you so sure I bribed him?'

'I'm not worried if you bribed him; he would take your money and rush to report to his boss But if you came in when he left the door open, he could be in trouble for falling down on his job.'

'Do you really think that?' She looked perturbed.

'Yes.'

'He came in to lower the blinds, and I slipped in behind him, and hid in the wall cupboard by the door,' Faith said. 'I'm in Room 501, just along the passage. He certainly doesn't know I'm here' She frowned 'He wouldn't get in trouble for something as simple as that, surely.'

Roger said: 'Losing his job could be serious enough trouble for him.' He turned round from the window and sat down on a long contemporary-style settee, all foam rubber, highly polished wood and black mock mohair He crossed his legs and looked up at the girl, completely sure of himself

now, temptation firmly in check, policeman and detective fully in control of the man. 'What do you want, anyway?'

She didn't answer.

'Am I supposed to guess?'

'You ought to be able to guess, but you don't have to,' said Faith. Now she began to smile as if she, too, had become more confident of herself. She pulled up a stool which had a thong seat, the thongs criss-crossed in little squares. She sat down on this, and it was impossible not to be aware of the grace of her movements, the fact that she lowered herself as if without effort, and sat without support although the stool was low. She tucked her legs to one side and hugged her knees; the dress slid upwards, so that the nylon-clad legs showed as far up as the double layer of stocking; and above he caught a glimpse of her white skin. Everything about her was posed, and yet at the same time it had a contradictory naturalness.

'All right,' Roger said. 'I won't guess.'

'I came to suggest a fair exchange,' she said.

'Did you?'

'A very fair exchange.' She leaned backwards a little, and her eyes narrowed but they were glowing again, perhaps with the light which came in at the slats of the blinds; it was strange that in leaning backwards while hugging her knees, she gave a remarkable impression of seductiveness. It seemed to Roger that she could turn on that seductiveness at will; that one moment he had seen her simply as a witness and a rather silly young woman, and the next he felt as if all he wanted to do was to go closer to her. Siren-like, she was calling him, inviting him, promising . . .

'An exchange of what?' he asked.

'Roger,' she said, very softly. 'I want to know what Jim Nightingale said, and I know that I won't have a chance to talk to him. I also know you wouldn't lie to me.' She paused, still smiling, still leaning away from him, and affecting him with that almost magnetic attraction 'So why don't we exchange what you can tell me about Nightingale – just what Jim said, nothing else – for a night of passion?'

# 19

# *NIGHT OF PASSION*

ROGER FELT quite sure that she meant exactly what she said: that she was offering herself in exchange for information. Yet there was something else, something he only dimly understood, but which seemed to become clearer all the time he looked at her. She was quite beautiful, her skin was flawless, her body feline in its suppleness. Now she leaned farther back, almost as if she would fall off the stool, and her eyes were so narrow that he could hardly see beyond the sweeping lashes. She was smiling, and showing only a glimpse of white teeth. Roger felt an overwhelming temptation to go forward, to stretch out his hands, to draw her towards him; and at the same time he knew that it would be folly and it might be fatal to all prospects of success in the investigation. So he edged farther on to the corner of the couch, looking relaxed – hoping that he looked relaxed – and half smiling.

'Passion,' he echoed. He managed to draw all the fire out of the word, to make it sound flat and lifeless.

'Is it so long since you knew what it was like?' Faith asked.

'You need two minds for passion,' he said.

Her smile widened a little.

'Two bodies, surely.'

'Faith,' Roger said, 'I don't think we're going to agree on what constitutes passion.' He searched for words which might break through her pose of sophisticated sexuality, and said deliberately: 'It's a long time since a nice girl asked me to go to bed with her. I've never seen bed as part of a business deal, though, and I'm not going to start in Pretoria.' He smiled; and he was pleased with the smile, it was brisk and bright and matter-of-fact. 'Supposing we forget that.'

'Handsome,' she said again, 'you might never get another chance like it.'

'I'll take the risk.'

'You've made one mistake for certain,' she said.

'What's that?'

'Thinking I'm a nice girl.'

'A she-devil when roused?' mocked Roger. He shifted his position, sitting more upright; the triumph of mind over body had given him a lot of satisfaction, and he felt that the moment of danger was past. 'The female of the species being more deadly than the male – is that what you mean?'

Faith did not move, hardly seemed to be breathing, just looking at him, and trying to draw him towards her, and smiling in a way he could only think of as inscrutable.

'My uncle always told me that there is a Puritan buried deep in every Englishman, and a Victorian in every father. I'm beginning to see what he meant. Are you really as wife-bound as you're pretending?'

It would be easy to resent the word 'wife-bound'. It would be foolish to show her any sign of resentment. Now he began to think more about Faith as a person rather than about her proposal, and again he wondered what was really going on in her mind.

'Let's say when I get home I'll feel happier if I can look at my wife without hoping she doesn't find out that a sex-kitten in South Africa seduced me.'

'So it's fear of being found out,' Faith retorted. 'What are you really worrying about? We're six thousand miles away from your wife and home. The only people who can possibly know we're in this room together are the police, and they aren't judges of morals – oh, I forgot! Here they are, but we're not in any danger, our skins are both white. Our skins are both white,' she repeated, very softly. 'Beautiful and white. Forget the possibility that someone will find out and betray you, Handsome. Your wife can't believe that a man as virile as you, who has to spend so much time away from her, is so virtuous that he never makes a concession to his manliness.'

'You might know what you believe, but you can't guess what my wife thinks,' Roger retorted. 'Now supposing we stop this nonsense. There are some things I may be able to

tell you tomorrow, but I'm not going to say a word tonight. I've had a long day and I'm tired. But I'd like a good dinner before going to bed. Colonel Wiess recommended the Sky Room at the top of a new hotel – would you like to have dinner there with me?'

'And forgiving, too.' Faith said. There seemed a touch of malice in the word, almost as if she was angry and possibly hurt in her pride, but did not want to let him know it. When he looked back on this interlude, he would probably regard it as one of the strangest in his life. He stood up, adding: 'I'm assured that the food's really good.'

She didn't stand up, but leaned a little to one side in order to see him more clearly.

'Handsome,' she said, 'I think you're being very gallant. You needn't be. And you're being very old-fashioned, too. I suppose you work so hard that you don't really have time to keep pace with modern thought. It is no longer a woman's crowning glory to be chaste. Love is no longer an emotion which has to last for ever. It comes and goes; it blows hot and cold. I have heard it called sex for fun, and you'd be surprised how many of my generation believe in it. Don't be afraid of it, Handsome, it's a wonderful thing.' Her voice had become husky, and she was smiling more widely. She moved one hand and stretched it towards him, as if she wanted to pull him down on top of her. 'You especially shouldn't be afraid,' she whispered. 'Have you forgotten how good looking you are? Have you forgotten that when you walk into a room every young girl looks up at you and starts to think about you, and to wonder what it would be like to have you alone, for an hour or for a night? You are an attractive male, a very attractive male, one of the most attractive males, and I don't think any one woman has an exclusive right to you.'

'Don't you?' he asked harshly.

'No,' she said. 'Roger, darling, stop pretending. Stop resisting.'

He would never be faced with greater temptation.

She seemed to sense that he was poised on the edge of in decision, that she had broken through his defences, and that

soon she would be able to have her way. He moved back. She stretched out and took his hand, and said:

'Pull me up.'

He said, hard-voiced: 'You're wasting your time.' He pulled, and she pulled also, so that in a moment she was on her feet in front of him, only a foot or two away. She raised her hands, linked the fingers together and seemed about to place them on top of her head, but with slow, deliberate movements she lowered them behind her head, thrusting her bosom forward. He realized that she was unfastening the zipper of her dress. Even wearing that dress she was like a statue of a naked woman. She lowered her hands to her sides, then put her right hand up behind her, slowly, and moved it downwards; there was the faint sibilance of a zipper being pulled down.

Roger stood rooted there. Faith was still smiling, and he thought as he had thought in London that there was only one word for her: 'Desirable'. She was wholly desirable and beautiful, and his for the taking. She was woman and he was man, and they were together and there was no other place in the world.

He knew what she was going to do and he knew that he should stop her, that he should do something to break down the pose which seemed so natural to her.

She began to shrug her shoulders.

He reminded himself that he knew exactly what she was going to do: shrug that dress off her shoulders, shrug it until it fell and gathered about her waist, leaving her breasts bare or so nearly bare that it made no difference. And then she would slide the dress down over her long, lovely thighs and over her hips, and—

She murmured: 'Beautiful white skin, darling.'

The dress was off her shoulders. He was still staring at her. His mouth was parched. His skin felt dry on the forehead and on his cheeks. He kept wanting to moisten his lips, but did not. If he waited any longer it would be too late, and as he acknowledged that he found a question creeping into his mind, a question she had put there – a question which seemed to grow louder.

The question was: Why not?

The question became: She's utterly desirable, why shouldn't I take her?

And the question became: What's wrong about it?

The dress was right off her shoulders, now, tight for a moment across the tops of her breasts. She shrugged again and it began to fall lower, so that he could see the swelling shapes and the shallow valley between.

*What was wrong about it?* He needn't give her any information; she wouldn't be able to drag a word out of him, so – *why not?* Men did, thousands of men did, most men did. Didn't they? And it was not as if he would harm her, she was a self confessed believer in free love, she would give herself wherever her fancy lay, with no thought of right or wrong. He felt quite sure that was true, he remembered something that Soames had said although he couldn't remember the words clearly, he couldn't remember anything clearly. He could only see Faith, very clearly. She seemed to be closer. Now the dress was gathered about her waist, and he saw that she had only a gossamer brassière on, holding her high and proud, concealing nothing.

It wouldn't do Janet any harm; she would never know; Janet would never know. Janet, Janet, Janet, Janet.

He was sweating.

There was a mist in front of his eyes and he did not understand it, but slowly it cleared, and then he could see that Faith had slipped the dress off and was stepping out of it. She wore no belt, nothing but the bra and close-fitting panties which hardly seemed to disturb the beautiful line of her figure.

She held her hands out towards him.

'Come, my darling,' she said.

He did not know why, but afterwards when he thought about it he believed that it was because she smiled as she spoke, and her smile seemed to say that she knew she had won, and that he could not resist her; her smile seemed to say that she was utterly sure of herself, and could destroy not only his resistance but also his will; could corrupt all that he believed in. Whatever the cause, a different kind of thought

entered his mind, and a different mental picture. It was as if, when he had almost cried out: 'Janet, Janet, Janet, Janet,' he had been calling for her help, that he knew that without her he was lost; as if out of the depths of his sub-conscious there was a great need of her. He could see her. It seemed almost that she had come and answered his call, was standing behind Faith but could not draw nearer. She stood there and watched, but her expression seemed to say 'Choose me.' Whatever decision he made had to be his own, unaided.

The strange thing was that Janet was not the old Janet, young and lovely in her way, nor the Janet dressed for the occasion and looking at her striking best. It was the tired, rather careworn, rather remote Janet, and in the vision he could believe that she felt remote and aloof, that she knew there was nothing she could do except be with him.

'My darling,' Faith repeated softly. 'Take me.'

Words were like stones as Roger spoke.

'I'm going out,' he said. 'I'll be back in twenty minutes. If you're not gone when I return I shall telephone Wiess and tell him that I caught you here. That you'd forced entry. If you want to talk, I'll be downstairs in the foyer. We can eat together at the restaurant here.'

He saw the astonishment of utter disbelief in her eyes. They could never have been larger nor more beautiful. Nor had he seen her look so young, so like a child.

He turned away. He strode to the door. He fumbled for the latch, and it slipped from his fingers, so he made himself control them more firmly, and gripped the latch and opened the door. As he did so, a white clad figure vanished, wraith-like, into another room along the passage, but he hardly noticed it. He closed the door, but it would not fasten, and suddenly, viciously, he tugged at it with all his strength, and it slammed with a crash of sound which seemed to shake the very walls and floor.

## 20

# *MORNING*

He walked down the stairs rather than be taken down by the diminutive lift boy. Two parties of four were gathered in the hall, wearing evening dress, they seemed to come from a different world. Two more swept in, and from a room out of sight there came the sound of music. Someone was singing a ballad Roger looked about for the bar, found an *American Bar* sign and went into a box of a room with a coloured bar-tender and the usual miscellany of bright colours in the bottles behind the counter. He ordered a double Scotch, and tossed it down, ordered another, and sipped. The Indian bar tender was watching him curiously Two other men on their own sat at the bar, one of them with his face buried in his hands, his attitude strangely despondent. One or two couples were at tiny tables round the walls. Roger found the round topped stool hard and uncomfortable. He felt low and almost depressed, without knowing why. He did not want to think. He finished the second drink and went into the foyer; more dancing couples were arriving, everyone seemed gay and carefree and happy.

The manager came up, also in dinner jacket.

'Have you everything you require, Mr West?'

'Everything, thanks' It had been a mistake to tell the girl that he would wait for her downstairs But he hadn't He said he would be back in twenty minutes, and if she wasn't out of his room he would call the police. It need not take her more than a few minutes to dress Minutes? A few seconds, to pull that dress over that slim body. Would she have dinner with him? Had he been wise to suggest that they should eat together? The truth was that he did not want to make an enemy of her, but probably he had done that already. My God! What must she have felt like when he had turned

away from her? Pride in her body, in her sex, in her ability to conquer a man, had all been spoiled. What would she do and how would she react?

He had been down for nearly half an hour, so he went upstairs by the lift. This time there was a tall, lanky boy on duty, lift attendants seemed to change very hour or so. He strode briskly along to his room, opened the door, and went in. He was not fully convinced that Faith would be gone; she might have decided to accept his challenge, and to try again.

She wasn't here.

There was a note on the stool on which she had sat, and he picked it up. It read: *I'll dine in my room.* Did that mean that she felt much the same as he, and didn't want to make an enemy of him? That kind of thing could cut both ways. He felt glad that she had taken the trouble to leave the note behind, and wondered whether he would be wise to telephone her. Not tonight, he decided, what kind of fool would that make of him? He went downstairs again, and out into the well-lit streets, and walked for twenty minutes until he came upon a restaurant with curtained windows, and the words *Cuisine Française* in gilt lettering across the glass panel of the door He went in The room was low-ceilinged, candle-lit, pleasant, and quiet, just right for his mood. A surprisingly youthful-looking man led him to a table in a corner where he was sheltered by a screen that appeared to be made of palm fronds. The menu seemed promising. There was background music, as at the hotel. He ordered a half bottle of a South African claret and a *bifstek en casserole*, and found it delicious and satisfying. In one way it was a pity he was on his own, but in another it meant that he could let his thoughts drift over all aspects of the situation, and did not have to put up an act with other people. Before he had finished the meal he was thinking, almost exclusively about the case, and even wondering whether he had been left on his own deliberately. That was an absurd thought. He began to think of Nightingale's story and the fact that Van der Lunn might be a serious suspect. What

would Wiess and the Minister of Justice and all the rest think if that were the case?

By the time he was ready to leave, Roger felt almost normal, except that he was very tired, both physically and mentally: one good night's sleep would put that right. He went back to the hotel and upstairs, hoping that he would have no more shocks.

The suite was empty, but the bed had been turned down.

Last night he had slept in snatches on the aircraft, the night before he had been very late and wakeful, lying next to Janet. Janet, Janet, Janet, Janet. As he got ready for bed he wondered what she would think if she knew what had happened tonight.

He dropped off into deep, dreamless sleep – so absolute that although he heard the sound of a bell ringing he was not really conscious of what it was for a long time. There it rang, a million miles away, from another world but with an insistence which gradually brought awareness of it. *Brrr-brrr. Brrr-brrr.* Slowly, reluctantly, resentfully, he became aware of the urgency, became aware of the fact that it was to do with his waking life, not something he could ignore. So, slowly, he woke. The bell was the telephone bell, of course. It kept on and on. It was a long time before he was awake enough to know that he had only to stretch out his hand and lift the receiver to stop the ringing. There would be an obligation beyond that, one which he did not want.

He turned over, stretched out his hand and lifted the telephone. It was as smooth as a serpent, and slipped out of his grasp. It clattered on the floor, but at least the ringing stopped. Should he leave it there? He knew that he should not and knew that he wanted to above everything else. But he was awake now; his conscience as well as his consciousness were working together. He stretched down to the floor at the side of the bed and groped for the telephone. He heard a sound. He put the receiving end to his ear, and he heard a woman, shouting:

'Answer me – please answer me.'

A woman. In distress, in despair, in fear.

Her voice was shrill, touched with desperation.

'Please answer me!'

Roger said: 'Who's that? What do you want?' He was lying on his stomach, nearly halfway off the bed, but his mind was vividly alert; sleep was in the past and all he could think of was this woman.

'Handsome!' she cried, and her voice seemed to cut through him. 'I've been kidnapped. I'm in a village about halfway between Pretoria and Johannesburg.' He did not know whether the fear in her voice was real or pretended, whether this was another way to win his interest; he only knew that there seemed to be horror in her voice. Then she gasped: *'They're coming!'*

Roger said: 'Now listen. *Listen*. Where are you?'

'I'm on a road near Johannesburg, I tell you. A man – a man phoned and said he was a friend of Jim's. *I can see them* – two men. Handsome! I'm – scared.'

'What car is it?'

'A Ford, a Ford Consul.'

'Colour?'

'It's black. They're coming nearer – I can see them; they're slowing down.' He could hear the sound of a car engine. He thought he heard a man's voice, beyond Faith's. 'I'm on the outskirts of a village, there's a telephone – *they're coming*.'

'Are they black men or white?' He heard the bedroom door open and saw light streaming in from the passage and two men outlined against it: Percival and someone in police uniform. He called to them: 'Telephone Police Headquarters! There's been a kidnapping – the road between here and Johannesburg on the edge of a village.' He could hear the girl gasping for breath; it was easy to believe she was struggling. 'Handsome!'

And then she screamed.

And then the line went dead.

In the doorway, Percival was standing and staring. Along the passage a Bantu policeman was running very fast but making little sound. Roger banged the receiver back on to the platform, and rolled over and got up quickly. He sprang to his feet and ran towards the door; Percival dodged to one

side as if he were scared. Roger reached the door of 501 and banged on it, but there was no answer.

'Open this door!' he roared at Percival.

The room boy's hand was trembling so much that he could not insert the key. Roger snatched it away and thrust it in, turned the handle and flung the door open.

It was a large room, and the bathroom was on the right, a hanging cupboard with sliding doors on the left, and beyond these there was the foot of a double bed. There were some woman's clothes, neatly folded. He ran in, and saw the crumpled bedclothes and a pillow on the floor, a book on its face, a bedside lamp still alight, a pair of glasses by the book. So she had been to bed, and the call had come, and she had gone away in response to it.

. . .

Captain Standish was in the police car with him. Another police-car was fifteen minutes ahead of them, and the Johannesburg police had been called out, too. Probably the whole of the police in the area had been alerted. Standish looked as wide awake as if it were the middle of the morning, not the middle of the small hours; in fact, it was half past three. The sky was still vivid with stars. Very little moved, and there were no lights except in the distance, making a canopy over Johannesburg, and far behind them, over Pretoria.

Standish was saying: '... she must have gone through the kitchen, that was the only exit not watched. It looks as if she was kidnapped, but could she have been foxing?'

Roger said: 'Yes, I wondered if she was.' He did up the collar of his shirt, for it was cooler here by night than he had expected, and the heat generated by exertion and alarm had gone from him. He looked and felt dishevelled, but there was some satisfaction in the fact that it was less than half an hour since he had been called, and when so much had been put in hand.

He saw some red lights ahead; the rear lights of a car.

'What made you think she might have been lying to you?' Standish wanted to know.

'She tried to do a deal with me earlier in the evening. She

badly wanted to know what Nightingale had said. I turned her down. I had a feeling she might hate my guts because of that.'

'That kind of turn-down,' Standish said: there was a half sneer in his voice. 'Quite the soul of rectitude, aren't you?' Roger stared at the red light and saw some pale yellow lights on the right and left, and realized that they were approaching a village. Two cars were standing just off the road, and the headlights of another were coming from Johannesburg, the car swaying up and down. 'Looks as if they've found something. Did anyone else say anyth ng?'

Roger said: 'She sounded as if she was hysterical with fear.' Then: 'No. I heard a car, and fancied there was a man's voice, that was all.' The driver slowed down, and a police-lieutenant came towards them. He put his head to the window close to Standish, and said:

'The Ford Consul was here, Captain.'

'Sure of that?' Standish pushed the door open.

'Yes, Captain We have found a boy who was sneaking away from his girl friend's quarters, and he saw the car. It was a dark one and a Consul - the boy works at a garage, he knows. He saw two men carry a struggling woman from the telephone box into the car.'

'We've an eye witness!' Roger exclaimed as he scrambled out.

'For what it's worth,' said Standish.

At least this seemed to be confirmation of everything that Faith had said over the telephone.

Roger saw a little man standing between two Bantu policemen, some distance off the road, and saw two policemen searching the road and the telephone kiosk, one of them using a torch the beam of which seemed very bright.

'It was too dark to see them properly, but he says they were white,' went on the lieutenant. 'We've sent a message back to Johannesburg, as it went in that direction,' he added. 'We'll get it.'

A man called out from the kiosk: 'Here's something.' He did not seem to realize who had arrived in the other car, but stood beckoning. Two more men moved towards the spot,

one of them carrying an even larger torch. They converged on the kiosk and Roger was almost afraid of what they were going to find.

It was a tiny purse, wide-open. Some rand notes were folded and tucked into it, and there were pennies on the floor, and the glint of silver, too.

'And something else, Lieutenant,' said the man who had called out in that guttural voice. 'A torn dress, I think.'

'Dress,' echoed Roger.

Undoubtedly, it was part of a torn dress, the one which he had seen a few hours earlier as Faith had shrugged it off her shoulders. He was quite sure of the material and the colour as he fingered it and looked at it, and the shape and the edge showed that it had come off the neck.

'There isn't anything else we can do,' Standish said. 'But you can be sure we'll search for her as if she was worth all the missing diamonds. You'd better come back to Pretoria. I can imagine what you feel like, but this isn't a case for the Yard.'

. . .

It was half past four when Roger entered the bedroom again. He did not get undressed, but kicked his shoes off, undid his collar, and stretched out on the bed, quite sure that he would not get off to sleep again. His mind was working at top speed, sifting everything he knew and everything he suspected, separating facts from rumours and suspicions, trying to see what he knew existed in the pattern of events but was obscured or too complex. At least the kidnapping of the girl had jolted him out of the mood he had been in last evening; now he could look on her as someone in whom he had to be interested. There was no feeling of guilt in allowing himself to think about her.

He and Standish had asked the obvious question time and time again in the car coming back.

Why should anyone kidnap the girl?

There must be an answer.

As he lay there, feeling more sleepy than he had expected, Roger turned that question over and over in his mind, but

could not get an answer. He had a feeling that it was so obvious that it was like something on the tip of his tongue, but it would not come.

Sleep did . . .

The second sleep was as deep as the first, but there was one big difference; when he woke, it was on the instant without any sense of fear or of reluctance, and yet with a sense of urgency. The bell wasn't ringing. No one was tapping at the door. There was an unfamiliar sound, of rushing water – water running into a bath. Then he saw Percival, immaculate and smiling, step out of the bathroom.

'Baas take bath?' he inquired.

'Good idea,' Roger said. He glanced round. 'What time is it?'

'Half past seven, baas. This is going to be very busy day.' Percival's smile was enormous. 'You like yo' tea before bath or after it?'

'After. In ten minutes.'

'Yes, sah.' Percival went padding out. He had left a huge pink bath-towel hanging near the tub, and everything was in position, including a big kuffah. Roger had a tepid bath followed by a cold shower, and was dabbing himself dry when Percival came in with the tea tray. He put it down, appeared at the door and said: 'Tea ready, baas,' and went out. Roger stepped into the bedroom, mother-naked, pulled on his cotton pants, and then remembered that he had raised the blinds the night before. The offices of the bank directly opposite his window seemed to be peopled by girls all glancing this way. He pulled on a vest behind the bathroom door, and then went into the bedroom for the tea – and as he lifted the milk jug, he saw a letter.

He picked it up, and read the printed words: *Cable & Wireless*. It was addressed to him care of Police Headquarters, so they hadn't lost much time sending it over. He poured out tea and then tore open the cable.

It read:

*Joshua Bradshaw missing believed flying Johannesburg via Amsterdam stop. David Bradshaw had two banking*

*accounts under assumed names totalling over fifteen thousand pounds Joshua one of eight thousand stop. First ten replies to police questionnaires in stop. Total commercial value of diamonds involved already over hundred thousand stop. Places involved so far Paris Brussels Amsterdam Madrid Stockholm Milan Dublin Lisbon London and Cairo stop. Signed Klemm.*

Very softly, Roger began to whistle. He was still whistling, and thoughtful as well as anxious for news of Faith, when the telephone bell rang. He was nearly dressed, and feeling physically and mentally on top of himself; it was as if the conflict with Faith had cleansed both his mind and body. When he thought of that, he chuckled at the obvious implication.

'Roger West,' he said into the telephone. As he did so, he thought that this could be a message from or about Faith, that it might be of vital significance, and nothing at all seemed funny.

'This is Colonel Wiess's *aide*,' a man said in a deep, assured voice. 'Colonel Wiess's compliments, and he would like you to breakfast with him. He will be at your hotel at eight o'clock, and a room has been reserved.'

## 21

## *TACTICS*

HE HASN'T slept all night, Roger thought as Wiess entered the room. The sun, slanting throught the venetian blinds, shone full on to his face and into his eyes, and he blinked and turned away quickly. The brick-red face was that of a man who spent a long time in the open air: there were one or two little red marks, suggesting that he had shaved in a hurry. As he shook hands with Roger, his eyes looked very tired and red rimmed, but his grip hinted at his physical strength.

'I am sorry you had an anxious time last night,' he said. 'And I am also sorry that there is no news of Miss Soames. It is most regrettable, although there is reason to believe that it is partly her own fault.'

'Ah,' said Roger. 'Why?'

'It appears that she did receive the telephone call, the nature of which we do not know, and that she left the hotel by the kitchen exit, which was not under surveillance.' Wiess did not say whether he thought it should have been. 'A street patrol saw her driving out of the parking place. The car was found near the telephone kiosk, abandoned.' Wiess stepped towards the window and adjusted the blind so that no direct light shone through. 'You permit that?'

'Of course.'

'I am sorry also to ask you to a conference so early in the morning,' Wiess went on, turning towards the table, which was beautifully laid, silver glistening, damask shining 'However, I have urgent business during the day which I must attend. I am sure you understand.'

'Yes,' Roger said. 'Was the disturbance a bad one, Colonel?'

Wiess looked at him squarely His eyes suddenly seemed less tired, as if the question had put him on the defensive, and wariness drove weariness away Before he answered, there was a tap at the door A European head-waiter with a French accent came in, followed by two Bantus in spotless white. The head-waiter presented the menu with a flourish; there were seven courses Wiess hardly glanced at it, but said:

'Fish, steak, two eggs, sausages.'

'Very good, sir.'

'I'll have the same,' Roger decided.

'Would you like your steak well done, sir?'

'Medium well.'

'Like the Colonel always has his,' said the head-waiter; so breakfast time sessions were not unusual One of the Bantus came up with coffee, another poured out for Wiess and Roger; they were left to add their own hot milk. All of this Wiess took for granted, and he sipped the hot coffee until

the waiters went out. The wariness had gone, and weariness was back.

'Yes,' he said, 'it was a bad night. Two Asians and three Bantus were killed before the police were able to quell the disturbance It began over a dispute about seats on a bus. Why must there always be enmity and bloodshed?' He looked towards the window, and it was strange to see that strong and powerful face touched by an emotion which, if not grief, was certainly sadness. Then he squared his shoulders, and turned back to Roger. 'But this will not affect our inquiry, Superintendent. I have told you all about Miss Soames It is now obvious that someone whom she knew or whom she believed she could trust telephoned her, and she went to see them. Something alarmed her, and she tried to escape from them. Her car tyre was punctured by a bullet. We have the bullet, a .22 of Italian manufacture. That does not surprise you, does it?'

Bradshaw had been killed by a similar bullet.

'No,' Roger said heavily. 'It certainly doesn't. Have you any idea who the men were?'

'One was a small man, according to the witness.' Wiess gulped down another cup of coffee, and broke a roll and spread half of it liberally with butter. 'That does not surprise you, either. It has not been possible to get a detailed description, but what we do know tallies with your description of the man who murdered David Bradshaw. This, I understand, was probably one of two Italians, named Severini and Galli. Several men answering their descriptions have entered the country in the past forty eight hours, some by air to the Jan Smuts Airport, some across the border with Southern Rhodesia, at Beit Bridge. These two men may be in the country. We cannot jump to conclusions, but neither can we ignore possibilities. You were about to say something?'

'Did you see the cable which reached me this morning?'

'I know nothing of it.'

'Bradshaw's brother has left England and the Yard thinks he's on his way here, *via* Amsterdam,' Roger said flatly.

Wiess made no comment, just stared. Roger took the cablegram from his pocket and handed it across the table.

Wiess took a long time reading it, and then said:

'You had no reason to suspect the brother, did you?'

'Not until now.'

'They do not say when he left, and it is possible that he will be here on the morning's KLM flight,' reasoned Wiess. 'It is not likely to arrive until midday or afterwards; there is good time to make sure this man does not enter the country.'

'I wonder if it's a good idea to hold him at the airport, or even to let him know that we've any idea who he is,' Roger suggested, very thoughtfully. Wiess made no comment, but waited to hear more. The door opened and the two Bantu boys came in, each bearing a silver salver. The hand which placed the fish on Roger's plate was as black as ebony. When they had retired, Roger went on: 'Did you have a chance to discuss Nightingale with the Minister of Justice?'

'Yes I am to use my own discretion,' Wiess told him. 'Until the disappearance of Miss Soames I was inclined to agree with you that we should allow him to have freedom of movement in this country. Now—' He shrugged his powerful shoulders. 'You suggest that Joshua Bradshaw should have the same freedom, of course It could be very dangerous. There are many ways out of this country, many borders which it is impossible to control thoroughly, places where those who know the country can slip across into Southern Rhodesia, even into Bechuanaland and South West Africa.'

'If Nightingale and Bradshaw are going to take such a lot of trouble to get into the country, what makes you think they'll be so anxious to get out?'

'They will certainly be anxious to get out when they have achieved their objective, whatever it may be,' Wiess said drily.

It was impossible to argue against that.

'If we were looking for Nightingale, or simply watching him, we might lose him,' Roger conceded. 'If we watched Bradshaw as well, the chance of them both getting away would be pretty small.' He watched Wiess fork the white fish, and ate a little himself; it wasn't particularly tasty, but went down easily enough. He finished, forced a smile, and went on: 'I know, it's easy for me to suggest the best course of

action; I'm not familiar with the kind of problems you know you'll run up against.' Wiess still did not comment, but finished his fish and pushed his plate back. 'There's one fairly obvious thing I didn't see until you were telling me what happened to Faith Soames.'

'What is that?'

'If Nightingale is telling the truth, he was framed so that you would prevent his moving freely about the country. Now an associate from *The Globe* is lured out of her room and then kidnapped. The same people could be involved for the same motive.'

'What motive?' demanded Wiess.

Roger shrugged. 'That's one of the answers we're looking for. One possibility is that they want to find out what she knows – and they wanted to find out what Van der Lunn knew.'

There was another tap on the door and the two waiters came in, this time with enormous silver dishes laden with more food. Roger watched as the black hand placed a large steak with two large sausages, some strips of bacon, two eggs, and some tomatoes on his plate, then placed the tray by his side; there was at least as much left on it.

'We'll help ourselves,' Wiess said, and the boys went off, long white gowns rustling slightly. Wiess ate solidly for several minutes, paused, and asked:

'So you would release Nightingale, allow Joshua Bradshaw to enter freely, and follow both in the hope that they would lead you to Faith Soames.'

'And the rest of the answers,' Roger said.

'Ah. Yes. It would need a large force of men, there would have to be no chance of either of them disappearing. Ach.' Wiess reminded Roger a little of Hardy in that moment; it was the first time he had thought of Hardy since he had arrived in South Africa. He did not try to persuade the Colonel, who was no more likely than Hardy to be persuaded about anything against his better judgement.

Suddenly, Wiess said: 'We will try it. Both men must be here for a purpose. Yes, we will try it.' He looked pleased that he had made the decision, and tucked into the rest of the

food, helped himself to another steak, and ate that with as much relish as he had the first; Roger gave up after a fourth sausage. The Bantus came in with fresh coffee, and Wiess watched them pour out, then waved them away. 'You understand, of course, that you will not be able to take any part in following them, for you would be recognized at a glance. We shall keep you fully informed. Captain Standish will be in charge here. We shall use Bantu detectives, for we find that people from England take Bantus for granted in our country. They do not suspect they are detectives!' Wiess gave the faintest of smiles 'I wish I could take personal charge, but it is not possible today or tomorrow. And in that time it is possible that there will be some results.'

'I hope so,' Roger said. 'One thing.'

'What is it?'

'If the time comes when I can do anything, will you make sure I get the chance?'

This time, Wiess smiled quite broadly.

'Yes,' he said 'I shall weigh up the balance between allowing a senior officer from Scotland Yard to be in danger, and of losing the services of a very capable man Remember, we are as anxious as you to find the answer to our questions.' The smile faded. 'In some ways we are more anxious. We have had a message from Scotland Yard this morning, about Mr Van der Lunn. He is neither better nor worse, and is still on the danger list The consequences could be very serious if he were to die, especially if this mystery is unsolved.' He paused, broodingly, and then went on: 'To start with, you may wish to see Nightingale again and to tell him that he will not be detained, although we shall hold his passport until we have satisfied ourselves that he has told the truth.

'I'd want to tell him that the girl is missing, too, and what happened to her,' Roger said.

'That is permissible.' Wiess stood up, tall and very erect. 'We shall need a little time to make sure that the arrangements for watching Nightingale are completed. It will also be advisable for you to be at the airport when the KLM plane arrives, so that you can identify Joshua Bradshaw. You see, we shall not allow you to laze your time away.'

## 22

# *LIE?*

NIGHTINGALE LOOKED much more rested and untroubled than Wiess had. A newspaper was open at the foot of his bed, which was made, he had shaved, and there was impatience in his manner as Roger appeared by the cell bars, but he restrained this impatience until the door had opened, Roger was inside, and the door was closed and locked again.

'One way of telling me you didn't do a good job,' Nightingale said harshly. 'I wonder if you really tried. I wrote that statement exactly as I told the story to you, and –'

Roger interrupted: 'How well do you know Faith Soames?'

Nightingale took a moment or two to adjust himself to the change of subject, and then asked sharply:

'What's she got to do with it?'

'Just answer my question.'

'She's got as keen a mind as her uncle, she doesn't know how to say no or how to allow anyone else to say no, and she has a memory like an electronic computer. Does that answer your question?'

'Yes. Did she know what you were coming here for?'

'No. West, what's all this about?'

Roger said: 'She decided she ought to come and hold your hand. She came, she tried to be clever, and she got herself kidnapped. No one knows where she is. Do you know where she might be?'

Nightingale breathed: 'My God.'

He backed to the bed, and sat down.

'My God,' he repeated. 'Faith.'

Roger asked sharply: 'Do you know who might have kidnapped her and where they might have taken her?'

Nightingale gulped. 'I—' he began, and then his eyes narrowed, and it seemed to Roger that something jelled in his mind, the shock was over, and he was beginning to think again, was probably beginning to lie. 'No,' he said, and then in a louder voice: 'Why the hell should I know who would do a thing like that?'

'You came here to look for someone – who was it?'

Nightingale said: 'I came here to see if I could pick up any more information about Van der Lunn. This was one time when he couldn't stop me. That's all.' His mouth seemed like a trap as he went on: 'What are the bloody cops doing to find her?'

'Scouring the countryside.'

'If anything happens to her—'

'If anything happens to her it will be her own fault, just as it will be your own fault if anything happens to you.'

'Nothing can happen to me in this bloody place.' Nightingale moistened his lips. 'My God, what will old Soames say? He worships her. Why the hell did he let her come? Why – West!' Nightingale gripped Roger's shoulder. 'Does he know she's missing?'

'Not yet.'

'He's got to be told. Do you hear? He's got to be told – and I've got to get out of this place.' His voice grew louder 'If you've any influence at all, get me out of here so that I can talk to Soames, and so that I –' He broke off, gritting his teeth. 'It's like being in a cage. I can't take it. Understand – I can't take it.'

'You'll have to take a lot worse for a lot longer if you play the fool again,' Roger said. 'They're holding your real passport so that you can't leave the country until they've checked on your story - and if you leave illegally you'll never be able to come back. Is that clear?'

Nightingale said wonderingly: 'You mean they'll let me go?'

'Yes.'

Nightingale frowned. 'Well, that's something. That's certainly something.' After a pause he asked sharply: 'Am I restricted to Pretoria?'

'No.'

Nightingale gave a fierce grin, and slapped Roger on the shoulder. The power in his arm was very great, the slap was almost painful.

'So you did your stuff. I won't forget it.' New life seemed to be pouring into him even as he stood there, and suddenly he clapped his hands together with a resonant bang. 'Will I be glad to move about again! This has been hell.' He broke off. 'When are they going to let me out?'

'Now.'

'How soon can I get through to Soames?' demanded Nightingale.

* * *

Standish, back on duty, put a small office with two telephones at Roger's disposal. It was a little after nine o'clock in Pretoria, six o'clock in London. Nightingale had given Soames's home number, and complained bitterly when he was told there would be an hour's delay.

'Except for priority, calls sometimes take a day,' Standish had said. 'Think yourself lucky.'

Nightingale was trying to bury his impatience in the *Johannesburg Star*. Roger was sifting through reports from Pretoria and Johannesburg about the hunt for Faith and her kidnappers. Whenever he thought of the girl, he had a tense feeling of anxiety, quite sure that when she had called him she had been in terror; and probably for the first time in her life she had come up against this kind of harsh reality. There were photographs of her from the newspaper files. There were also photographs of her car, the nearside rear tyre worn to ribbons where she had driven on it in desperation; and of the bullet, a *Lambetti* .22. There were photographs of the rifling on the bullet, of the tyre-tread of the Ford Consul as well as Faith's Jaguar, and there were fingerprints, blown up to twenty times their normal size. These were Faith's and those of a dozen other people who had been in the telephone kiosk fairly recently. Roger had the same sense of organization and thoroughness and of everything being under complete control as he had at the Yard.

The strangeness of the fact that everyone here was in uniform was wearing off; they might look and sometimes behave like soldiers, but they were just as much policemen as the CID at home.

'When the hell's that call coming through?' Nightingale muttered. He flung the newspaper aside. 'Can't you do anything to hurry it?'

Roger didn't answer, but passed him some of the reports and then read a time-table of reports about black or dark blue or dark green Ford Consuls which had been seen in the vicinity during the night or in the early hours of the morning. Four were marked with a red asterisk; these were cars whose owners had not been traced One of them, registration number SX2134, had been singled out for special attention, because of its speed, just as one might have been in Greater London. It had been seen racing through the suburbs of Johannesburg away from Pretoria, travelling through the towns of Heidleburg and Rensdorp, and was known to have joined the National Road from Johannesburg to Durban about forty miles out of Johannesburg. Wiess had put out a general call for it, and all its movements would now be traced.

A telephone bell rang. Nightingale jumped up and snatched at the receiver, grated: 'Hallo?' then muttered under his breath and thrust the instrument into Roger's hand. 'For you.'

'West,' said Roger, quietly.

'Have you seen the reports on the Consuls?' It was Standish, from next door.

'I've just finished,' Roger replied.

'We've had two more on SX2134,' Standish said. 'It's still heading towards Durban. It's being driven by a small man who might possibly answer the description we had last night, and a bigger man is sitting next to him. There's no report of a passenger, but three reports say that rugs are spread over the back.'

'Is it being followed?' Roger asked.

'Yes, by a patrol car of the Orange Free State. It will be picked up by Natal police very soon.'

'And stopped and searched?'

'Yes, of course.'

Nightingale was leaning across Roger's desk when he rang off, and their faces were very close together. Roger wondered about the man's relationship with Faith, whether he had a much deeper personal reason for anxiety than he had yet said.

'Was that about Faith?'

'Might be, might be not,' said Roger. 'The police are not missing any tricks, and—'

The telephone bell rang again, and once more Nightingale snatched up the receiver, only to hand it to Roger, for it was the call to London. He stood up very straight, staring at the wall over Roger's head, in much the way that Soames had in his office. Roger motioned to the extension telephone. There were noises on the line, words like. 'You there, London?' and 'This is London, one moment, please,' and then suddenly Soames's voice sounded; and there was no doubt that it was *The Globe* editor; his voice had a timbre which could not be mistaken even over six thousand miles.

'Hallo. Is that you, Faith?'

Nightingale said: 'No, Jack, it's not.'

'*Jim!*' Soames's voice changed its tone. 'Don't tell me she managed to get you out, you half wit How are you?'

'I'm fine. Jack, I've got bad news for you. Faith didn't get me out; West did that.'

'Who?'

'Handsome *West*.'

'Oh, the copper Good for him. How's Faith?'

'Jack,' Nightingale said, 'Faith's been sticking her neck out, and—'

Soames chuckled.

'I'll bet she has. Have you ever known her keep it in? How is she?'

Nightingale was finding it difficult to put the truth into words Now, although he should have given the answer, he moistened his lips and gulped Again it occurred to Roger that he might feel deeply for the girl.

'Are you there?' Soames demanded.

'Mr Soames, this is Roger West,' Roger said. 'I'm sorry to tell you that your niece is missing, sir. We have every reason to believe that she has been taken away against her will.' He gave Soames a chance to comment, but when the old man did not take it, he went on: 'The South African police are doing everything they can to find her, and you can be sure that once she is found we'll look after her.'

Soames said: 'Missing? Kidnapped?'

'Yes.'

'Who—' Soames seemed to choke. 'West!'

'Yes, sir?'

'You've got to find her.'

'Everything possible is being done,' Roger said. 'There's one thing you can do.'

'What is it?'

'Tell Nightingale that if he knows anything or even suspects anything about this, if he can even guess where Faith might be, he must tell the police.'

After a pause, Soames said: 'Yes. My God, yes. Jim – are you there?'

'I heard,' said Nightingale, stiffly.

'Tell them everything you can. D'you hear me? Tell them everything. You're always holding out on me, you're always telling me you know what's best, but don't hold out on the police over this. Not over Faith. She – *West?*'

'Yes, sir?'

'Do you think she is in danger?'

'She could be,' Roger said.

'Jim,' said Soames, thickly, 'you heard West, you heard me. If you know anything, tell the police. Hear me? Tell them.'

. . .

'If I knew anything at all I would tell you,' Nightingale said. 'But I don't know a thing.'

Roger felt almost sure that he was lying.

. . .

Standish asked a few routine and formal questions: where

Nightingale intended to go, where he proposed to stay, whether he intended to travel by air, road, or rail. Nightingale was obviously champing at the bit, and when at last he stalked off, saying that he was going to Johannesburg to consult his newspaper's office there, Roger felt that he was carrying a tremendous burden. Standish stood at the window and looked out, and Roger joined him and saw the newspaperman striding purposefully along the street. The only other people on foot in the street were Bantus.

'We'll know, wherever he goes,' Standish said confidently. 'Any idea what he's keeping back?'

'No. I've an idea why he might want to keep something back, though. He may think he can do a private deal for the release of the girl Supposing he tries? What will you do?'

'Supposing we wait for it to happen,' said Standish almost sharply. He waited until Nightingale turned out of the street, and as he went back to his desk his telephone bell rang He picked up the instrument as if he had all the time in the world 'Captain Standish' It was a considered pose, of course. He was out to impress Roger all the time. Suddenly his expression changed and all pretence was dropped 'The fools!' he roared. 'Where ... Yes .. Damaged? ... On *fire*.'

Roger stood rigidly by the desk. Judging from Standish's manner, this was shocking news. He saw a mind picture of Faith Soames, as she had been in his room last night, leaning back and tempting him, quite sure that he could not resist her.

'Use aircraft, of course,' said Standish. '*Of course*.' He banged down the receiver and stared at Roger, and for the first time Roger saw him really shaken. 'That Consul went over a cliff in the foothills of the Drakenberg, near Ladysmith. It caught fire. The police in the car which picked up its trail lost it on a by-road. The driver was obviously trying to evade them It isn't yet known whether the occupants were injured or not It isn t even certain whether they were in the car when it went over the edge.' Standish was clenching his hands tightly, and Roger wondered if, in fact, there was worse to come, when he went on: 'The accident occurred only thirty miles from Van der Lunn's mountain home.'

# 23

## *TOWARDS THE MOUNTAINS*

ROGER COULD picture old Soames's despair, knowing how much the girl meant to him. He could picture the blazing wreckage of the car at the foot of a ravine, and he could almost see the way the flames devoured the human flesh and blood. But there was no certainty that it had happened. He wanted to go to the scene and be on the spot when the rescue party went down to see if there was anything left to rescue, but he knew that was impossible.

Standish was saying:

'... it's time we got there.'

'Where?'

'The airport,' Standish said.

Roger stared; and then he remembered Joshua Bradshaw.

'How long will it take us to get there?'

'Half an hour,' Standish said. 'I wish—' He broke off when his telephone bell rang again, and snatched it up, quite as anxious as Nightingale had been. 'Captain Standish? ... Very good.' His tension left him, but exasperation replaced it as he put the receiver down. 'I have a verbal report to make,' he said. 'I cannot come personally to the airport. I will send Lieutenant Lukas with you, and he'll do everything he can to help. All you have to do is make sure the man is on the aircraft, and if he is, point him out.'

'There's someone else I could probably identify,' Roger said.

'Who?'

'Faith Soames.'

Standish looked as if that comment took him by surprise. He frowned, then shrugged it off without comment, just 'I daresay.' He pressed a bell, and a very tall Lieutenant of Police came in. He had thick hair at the back of his head,

but was almost bald in front – and again that reminded Roger of a Bradshaw; of Rebecca, with her hair straight back from her forehead and then a frizzy mop behind the band which held it in place. He had met Lukas already, and obviously the policeman had been briefed.

'The important thing is to keep out of this man's sight,' said Standish.

'Yes. If you have any word of the girl, can you let me know?'

'I will telephone a message to the airport,' Standish promised. His telephone rang again. He answered it quickly, then shook his head at Roger, and gave full attention to the call. Lukas led the way out of the office, out of the building, into a police-car with a Bantu driver waiting to take the wheel. Traffic was thick, and for the first time Roger realized that driving habits here were different from London, and the drivers seemed to take even more chances. One man cut in almost savagely as they approached a junction; another car cut in from the other side. Roger's heart was in his mouth, but the police driver seemed to accept it as normal.

He drove fast once they were on the open road, heading for the airfield at Kempton Park. The roads were good and straight, there were a lot of young pine trees lining some of them, and some new housing estates. Outside the airport there was a huddle of taxis and private cars, and an air of eager anticipation. As they drove through the main gates, the driver spoke to a guard in Bantu, and then reported in English:

'It is due in five minutes, sir.'

'Just good time,' Lukas remarked.

Roger half expected some word from Standish, but there was no message, and he told himself that it was folly to expect one. Why should he be so edgy about that girl? Would he have been, had it been anyone else? He didn't know. Soon they were led by an airport police-lieutenant to the control-tower, and to a seat close to a man wearing earphones and talking into a mouthpiece; obviously he was giving landing instructions. On a radar screen on one side there was the light dot which showed the aircraft coming in

to land. An atmosphere of bustle was everywhere. Bare-legged and bare-footed porters, mostly tall and handsome and very fit, pushed barrows and trucks towards the spot where the airliner would come in. Two ambulances and two fire-engines stood ready for emergency, a fuelling truck was in position.

What had seemed at first a dot in the sky soon became a recognizable shape, but there was little noise in the control-tower. The radio was silent now. The aircraft appeared to be straight in front of them, losing height rapidly. Yet it still seemed a long way off. It touched down, seemed to bound, touched again, and then with a lordly air of disdain, it slowed down on the runway and came gently to a stop.

Soon, the steps were pushed into position, the door of it opened, a stewardess appeared, then two officers, then the passengers began to straggle out.

The fifth man was quite unmistakably Joshua Bradshaw.

. . .

Bradshaw had a passport in the name of Bell, but everything else on it seemed to be accurate. Roger wondered how often he used it, and how long he had had it; they were questions which must soon be answered, but he had no time to worry about them then.

Lukas, by Roger's side, was already on the telephone to Standish. Roger watched the man whom he had last seen at Common View Hotel as he walked towards the Customs offices. It was very hot out there, and Joshua seemed to be sweating; he kept dabbing at his forehead with a grubby handkerchief. He kept looking round, too, almost as if he were fearful, and seemed to enter the Customs offices with relief.

Lukas said: 'Yes. He is here.' He handed the telephone to Roger. 'The Captain would like to talk to you.'

Roger said: 'Hallo?' And his heart began to thump.

'I can tell you one more thing,' said Standish. 'Nightingale went to the Johannesburg newspaper offices as he said, but left after five minutes. He has borrowed one of the news-

paper's cars, and is now heading south-east, along the main Johannesburg Durban road towards the Drakenberg. It is beginning to look as if he and the others will converge there.'

'We'll soon know where Bradshaw's going, as well,' Roger said.

'If he heads for the same direction, then I think you should, too,' said Standish. 'Stay there until we've some news – I've given Lukas instructions. If Bradshaw hires a car or is met by one, and heads for the Drakenberg, then I think we ought to fly to Ladysmith. That is near the place where the car went over, and by the time we reach there we shall know whether that car had passengers or not. Are you ready to fly?'

'Any time,' Roger said.

'I thought you would be,' Standish said drily. Something seemed to have put him in a much better mood. 'I'll come back as soon as I can.'

He rang off. Roger moved to the other side of the control-tower, and was then taken out along the roof until he could see the passengers as they cleared Customs and went to the waiting taxis and cars. Bradshaw went to a big black Chrysler, and a man in a chauffeur's uniform came up and saluted by touching the peak of his cap. They shook hands. There seemed to be no formalities at all, but Bradshaw got in, and took the wheel. It was a moment or two before Roger realized the significance of that.

Lukas said: 'It is a private hire car, of the drive yourself kind. I think that Bradshaw will drop the chauffeur at some convenient point, and then drive on by himself.'

Roger watched as the Chrysler moved off, turned two corners, and shot out of the main gates. It swung towards Johannesburg.

'He knows the airport and knows the road,' Roger said. 'He's probably been here often before.'

'I think you are certainly right,' said Lukas.

. . .

Two smaller aircraft came in during the next half an hour,

while Roger made a pretence of looking over the airport buildings. The sun was very hot, but the air so dry that he did not feel it except on the back of his head; he wished he had a hat with him. There was no shop near by He ought to buy something to cover his head. If he were going to be out in the sun often he would need one He kept passing his hands over the back of his head. Lukas took him to the airport restaurant for a drink or coffee; he chose coffee. He had nearly finished when a Bantu policeman in immaculate uniform came up and saluted.

'You are required on the telephone, Lieutenant. There is one close by.' He led the way to a telephone in the wall, took off the receiver and handed it to Lukas. No one else appeared to take any notice of them at all.

Lukas said: 'Yes ... Yes, Captain ... He *has*?' There seemed a very long pause before he spoke again, and then it was with obvious satisfaction. 'Very good, sir. I will.' He put the receiver down, turned to Roger, and said: 'Bradshaw dropped the chauffeur outside the hire company's garage in Eloff Street, and then went off along the National Road towards Durban Nightingale has already driven sixty miles along the same road.'

'Sixty?'

'You are not used to our fast main roads,' Lukas told him. 'Are you ready?'

'When you are.'

'The aircraft is waiting,' announced Lukas 'It is an old converted Dakota, larger than we require, but the only one available. The pilot and co-pilot have been given their instructions, and the engines are already warming up.'

Roger said: 'That's fine.' He stepped out of the shade of the building, and the sun struck very hot on his head again as he walked with Lukas to the aircraft, which was farther away than the jet airliner. That was already being refuelled and made ready for its homeward flight. By the time they reached the old-fashioned looking Dakota, Roger was sheltering the back of his head with his hand, but once they were in the shade of the aircraft's cabin, he forgot the heat. He felt the aircraft quivering as he stepped inside, and saw

that there were only ten seats; the rest of the space had been cleared for freight. The pilot was an unexpectedly plump and elderly man, probably in his sixties, the co-pilot looked hardly old enough to have his licence, but they did everything with a brisk efficiency and the take-off could not have been smoother.

'Visibility and conditions perfect,' the co-pilot announced. 'Ever flown here before, Superintendent?'

'Never been to Africa before.'

'I can't speak for all of it, but South Africa's a beautiful country,' the youngster said He reminded Roger of Richard, clean-cut and nice looking, with bright eyes and rather curly, dark hair, but above all he had something of Richard's enthusiasm. 'One of the most beautiful on earth.' Roger wondered if he had seen many other countries: could he be more than twenty-one or two? 'Like me to point a few things out, sir?' He pointed them out regardless. 'You can see Pretoria from here Ought to see it at jacaranda time, it's magnificent. Magnificent. I've never seen anything like it. See the Union Buildings? ... The Voortrekker Monument? ... Now over there you can really see what Johannesburg looks like from the air. Bit of a laugh to say that it's like New York – they say that about Sydney, too – but all the same those tall buildings are pretty impressive. The zoo and the park are a damned sight safer than Central Park in New York by night, even though Jo'burg's supposed to be such a deadly place ... That's the new Johannesburg Hotel they certainly needed a new one. American money, you can bet ... See the slag heaps over there, and the mine workings? They say the Rand is nearly played out, but you ought to see the new mines down at Welkom, fantastic place, as new in planning as anything they have in the United States. I must say that for them.'

The slag heaps and the city were already falling behind them. The river Vaal looked dark, almost black, with the mud which rains had washed along a thousand tiny tributaries. The sky was a metallic blue, and the sun looked like a ball of fire, but it was pleasantly cool in the cabin.

'Do you know the United States well?' asked Roger.

'It depends what you call well,' said the co-pilot, with a broad grin 'I've worked for three of the major airlines over there, had a few years with Cunard Airlines in little old England first. Absolutely love flying. Love it. Best way to see the world, too, but I've got a feeling that when I've got tired of travelling I'll come back here. Here, or the West Coast of America - they're the two places for my money. Now you won't see very much for a while, but before long you'll see the Drakenbergs rising up into the sky fantastic sight when you approach them from a reasonable height We'll go in at about three thousand. Have to fly down in the valleys if you're going into any of the mountain cities Why don't I show you some maps and pictures, and leave you alone for a bit?'

The pilot called: 'Good idea, you son of a cackler.'

Roger found himself smiling. He relaxed as he looked through the coloured illustrations of the Drakenberg Mountains and of Basutoland.

'Boy, is that rugged country up in Basutoland. Take it from me it's wild and woolly .. I went up there once, and nearly got lost. If it hadn't been for a little Basuto belle I probably would have been! She'd got lost, too, and all her family were out looking for her. Grandma to grandpa down to baby sister. Dozens of them Nearly got myself in trouble that time, because she was as naked as the day and I was pretty hot and stripped down to jockey shorts Or do you call them Y pants? . I want Tubby up there to start a new tourist service, kind of airborne safari, the only way to get to some of these inaccessible places. You could "do" Africa damned well in four weeks, and with a crate like this we could carry plenty of freight, too. Make a fortune.'

'Make a fool of yourself,' called out the pilot. 'Hey, Lieutenant, we were asked to look out for a fire.'

Roger felt tension coming back.

'Yes,' called Lukas.

'How would that do?' The pilot pointed to his right, towards the south, and they moved towards the windows and looked out. A faint haze of grey smoke was coming from the

rocky country below, not far from the ribbon-like twisting road. 'Looks like a car gone over the edge to me,' the pilot continued 'Wouldn't be much chance for the poor devils if that happened.'

Roger, peering intently, thought he saw the movement of men. As the aircraft turned in a half circle, and veered over steeply, they could see the other side of the ravine, the sun glinting on three cars, and men on the rocky slopes between the road and the ravine.

'Looks to me as if they're coming up,' the pilot said. 'Would you like to borrow my glasses?'

They were a huge pair of field glasses, which looked as if they were antiques from the First World War, but as Roger focused them, he saw the tangled wreckage of the car clear through a thin haze of blue-grey smoke There was a kind of track leading away from this and he raised the glasses until he could see the men There were eight of them altogether, and they seemed to be climbing upwards, away from the wreckage.

Nearer the mountains and towards the Indian Ocean was a tiny white speck, and very near it a big slag heap, pale grey in colour, and the wheel of a mine.

'Van der Lunn's home and Van der Lunn's diamond mine,' the pilot said. 'One of the oldest families in South Africa, the Van der Lunns. He's the last. His wife died years ago and he's got no children. But he always comes back there got luxury flats in Johannesburg and Sea Point in the Cape, travels round the world but this is home Hardly has time to take any personal interest in the mine these days – it's run by a manager. Well we'd better get down.'

Fifteen minutes later they landed at the Ladysmith airfield, little more than a landing strip. Half a dozen brightly-coloured private aircraft were clustered near the small office building, as well as a helicopter and several cars, two of them with a police sign up.

Two policemen, one a white lieutenant, one a Bantu sergeant, came smartly towards them. Roger forced himself to wait until Lukas asked:

'Have you a report on that burned-out car?'

'Yes, we have,' said the Lieutenant promptly. 'There was no one in it. It was pushed over the edge. The passengers must have gone off in another car, and we don't know what it was like. We're making inquiries.'

## 24

## *VAN DER LUNN'S HOUSE*

So Faith Soames hadn't perished in that fire, Roger thought with deep relief.

He felt the heat of the sun strike at him again as he studied the Lieutenant who had brought the news, a rock-like looking individual who might almost have been carved out of the stone of the great range of mountains. There they were in the distance, towering into the sky, massive and forbidding despite the fierce sunlight.

The pilot and co-pilot were unloading wooden boxes of freight. Roger, Lukas, and the lieutenant walked towards the shade of some small trees, and Lukas asked:

'Is there any news of Nightingale?'

'No,' the lieutenant answered. 'We've a lookout post up near the fork in the road, and two way radio contact. We would have heard if there was any word.'

'He wouldn't have had time to get here,' Roger said.

'He could have, if he travelled fast enough,' said Lukas. 'How soon can we be at the lookout post, Lieutenant?'

'In an hour,' the local man answered. 'Will you start right away?'

'We can't start too soon for Superintendent West,' said Lukas earnestly. They moved off towards one of the police-cars. This time the lieutenant took the wheel and they did not have a Bantu with them. Roger sat in front with him, Lukas in the back. It was no more eventful to them than it would have been to Roger had he stepped into a Divisional

car in a London suburb, but here he felt the strangeness of Africa, a sense of being somewhere remote and close to the primeval. As the car turned out of the airfield, two native women, arms and ankles covered in beads, great necklaces of tiny beads draped round their necks, walked along the dusty road without taking any notice of the car. Their smooth brown skin seemed to shimmer in the sunlight, the fine full breasts seemed to sway in a solemn dance as they walked along. Not far away, they turned off the main road on to a narrow dirt one which led towards the mountains, and in the distance Roger saw the round native huts, the kraal, from some of which he could see smoke rising. A big truck with a skinny Bantu driver and a dozen Bantus standing in the back came tearing past, ignoring them, but covering them with a great cloud of dust. The two policemen seemed to take it for granted.

The road became steeper There were rocky slopes on either side, and they seemed to be climbing all the time. Now and again the powerful engine of the car appeared to stutter in protest, but it always picked up. Soon, they were buried in the foothills of the mountains. Here and there they passed the mouth of a small mine, long since deserted, but apart from that there was rock and scrub and little else, until they came to a sign which read: *Main Road* in both English and in Afrikaans. They crawled up a sharp rise on to the main road, and immediately swung off it again up a narrow trail which seemed impossibly steep. The engine seemed to groan, but at last the terrain flattened out, and Roger realized that they had drawn in behind a huge rock which seemed to be of solid granite. A police-car was standing in the shadow, close to the rock, hidden from the road. A small tent was near the car, there was a wooden picnic table, some tins of food and an ice box, as there might be for any party camping out. On one side there were magnificent views of the mountains, rising in spiked pinnacles into the sky; behind them was the massive rock with some natural holes, like caves, created over the centuries by the erosion of wind and rain and cold.

A European police-sergeant was climbing down from one

of these holes. Behind him, still in the hole, were two Bantus, another European sergeant and a European constable, who took no notice of the newcomers.

'I am very glad to meet you, sir,' the first sergeant said as he shook hands with Roger. 'And very proud if I can be of help. No car has passed since we came, but I am informed that a car with two Europeans and one European woman passed on the way to Mr Van der Lunn's house earlier this morning.'

'Now we know what happened,' Lukas said confidently. 'This car was waiting for them when they reached a certain spot. They pushed the Ford over, and finished the journey in a Volkswagen. Looks to me as if someone left it off the road for them. There's one good thing: the woman is alive.' He turned to Roger. 'Would you like to see where we watch the road from?'

'Very much.'

'Just follow me,' said the sergeant, and as they moved up to one of the spy-holes, he went on: 'Will you speak with Sergeant Hombi? He is most excited at the prospect of working with you; he knows of your fame in England.'

'Of course,' Roger said.

Hombi was lying flat on his stomach and watching the distant road through binoculars. There was room for all of them to lie side by side, and the constable took the glasses as the sergeant said:

'Hombi, this is Superintendent West.'

Hombi might almost have been Jameson's twin brother, Roger thought; he had the same good looks, the same kind of reserved and almost diffident smile, and at the same time a self-confidence which gave a good impression.

'Would you like to look through the glasses, sir?'

'Very much,' said Roger.

Hombi tapped the constable on the shoulder, took the glasses, then stretched out on his stomach again, with Roger beside him. The far end of the cave seemed to make a kind of telescope in itself; in the distance they could see the road winding through the mountains, a tiny ribbon crossing savage stretches of rock and winding round jagged slopes in

a series of hairpin bends. With the glasses, everything was so much nearer; it was like looking out on to a mountain wilderness.

'You see any movement, sir?'

'No,' Roger said. He held the glasses to his eyes for another minute, hopefully, then wriggled out of position and handed them over. As he stood up near Lukas and the other European officers, it seemed much warmer, even in the shade of the rock, than in the hole itself. The sun was moving round slowly, and there was a bright stretch of sunlight only a yard or two away; heat seemed to creep from it. But it was not the brightness of the sun nor the desolation of the scene which worried him. He could not repress his anxiety any longer; his problem was to explain it in words which would cause no offence.

'Lieutenant,' he said to Lukas, 'what will happen if Nightingale and Bradshaw pass along here?'

'We shall move in,' Lukas answered, simply.

'But won't they be a long way ahead of us?'

Lukas frowned. 'I do not understand you.' It was easy to imagine from his expression that he had sensed criticism, and was ready to react against it. 'If they are not at the house or the mine, how can we move against them? It was you yourself who said that until we know where they are going and what they are planning to do, there is nothing we can do.'

Roger said gruffly: 'Yes, I did. But there's only the one road to Van der Lunn's house and the mine. They could block it.'

To his surprise and great relief, Lukas grinned broadly; he was really little more than a boy. The two other Europeans were equally amused, the block of a man turning a laugh into a snort. Roger waited.

'Let me show you,' Lukas said. He took another set of binoculars from the table near the tent, and put a hand on Roger's shoulder, then led him farther along the rock table. The sun struck fiercely at Roger's head, but soon they were in shade again; sunlight, shade, heat, and coolness, and all the

time uncertainty about Lukas and the others. They reached a ledge a hundred yards away from the camp. The remarkable thing was that the whole panorama changed; now they were looking in the other direction, at the sun bleached rocks and scrub, and the distant house seemed as if it were made of marble, it was so white. Less than a mile away, Roger judged, were the workings of the mine.

Lukas was studying this through the glasses. Suddenly he handed them to Roger, and said:

'Look straight at the house, then swing slowly towards the mine .. You see the slag heap? . Yes, good ... Move your glasses downwards very slightly ... Yes?'

Roger moved them. The house seemed to stand on one ledge of rock, and the mine and slag heap on another, a deep valley lay beyond these. In fact, the whole property seemed to stand on a stretch of table land rather like this one, approached only by the one winding road.

'Yes,' Roger said.

'Now, slowly to the right . You see the men?'

Roger thought: Men? He forced himself to hold the glasses very steady as he lowered them, and then saw a line of men, tiny even in the binoculars, climbing up the rocky slopes leading to the flat summit He moved the glasses again and saw another line moving in the same direction, but from another spot The scene reminded him of the men that he had seen climbing up from the wreckage of the car.

'Who are they?' His voice was tense with excitement, for he believed he knew the answer, and why Lukas and the others had been so amused.

'They are our men, Mr West,' Lukas announced. 'There are two patrols, each with a sergeant and six constables, climbing up. When we give the signal for them to move in, they will move at once They are local Bantus who know the terrain well There is no one to match them in the mountains. They are natural guerilla fighters, too, and we have trained them to get the best out of them. You understand we always have to be prepared for trouble in South Africa, and to have a well trained police force is essential.

Have no fear, Superintendent. If Nightingale and Bradshaw go up there, they will be caught very quickly.'

Roger found himself chuckling.

They turned back towards the camp, and as Roger screwed up his eyes against the sun in one of the clear patches, Hombie called out:

'A car is coming!'

Lukas and Roger ran forward, and scrambled into the larger hole. In the distance a black dot seemed to be moving. In five minutes it had become a blue Humber, moving very fast, throwing up a thick trail of dust Soon, it passed them. Roger put a pair of binoculars to his eyes, and saw there was only one man at the wheel: Nightingale, driving as if he had not a second to spare.

. . .

An hour and a quarter afterwards, Joshua Bradshaw drove past in a black Chrysler, the car which he had driven from the airport.

. . .

It was like moving forward in a military expedition, a sortie against rebels, perhaps, in the mountains of the Yemen or the hills of Cyprus. The police drove from the lookout camp in two cars, keeping radio contact with the two patrols who had signalled that they were close to the house and the mine, and could move in whenever directed. Roger felt a sense of anticlimax and yet of anxiety There were murderers in that house. Faith Soames was in their hands, and Nightingale, too. Nightingale must surely believe that he could bring the others to terms, but it might be only a forlorn hope.

And Joshua Bradshaw – what would he do?

Roger wanted above everything else to go forward, into the house, to find out what was going on. The five of them must now be together: Faith, Nightingale, Bradshaw, and the two who might be the Italians Severini and Galli. What had brought them all here with such urgency? Did they know that they were surrounded? Once they found out, what would they do?

The cars pulled up in the shadow of a huge slag heap, a man-made mountain of drab grey, with rough sides covered here and there with dark green, except where it was in the sunlight, where the green seemed as vivid as lichen. Roger and the others got out. Sergeant Hombi moved away, keeping under cover with a skill which told Roger how right Lukas was about the standard of training.

Now there was time to study the position of the house. It stood on a table of land which jutted out from a massive wall of rock, so that it could be approached from two sides and the front, but not from the back. Between the table and the mine-workings there ran a narrow ridge of rock, which seemed to cross a wide ravine, an ugly, jagged mass. Beyond the mines were some long, low roofed, stone-built buildings, the compound for the mine-workers.

The huge slag heap was fed by a narrow gauge railway with several tracks which were still and silent.

Whether by design or not, the house was in a fine defensive position, and to reach the table of land on which it stood the two patrols had had to climb up on two sides of the rocky slopes. The actual edges of the table were broken by cracks or fissures, some only a foot wide, some several feet.

Roger was still studying the terrain and realizing how difficult the climb had been for the Bantu constables, when Sergeant Hombi came back.

'They are in position and will move in on the signal,' Hombi reported to Lukas.

'Superintendent,' Lukas said to Roger, 'I hope you will wait here until we have completed the raid. As you yourself have said these men are dangerous, and they are armed. It is possible there will be shooting. I would be in serious trouble with my superiors if you were to be hurt. Please stay here.'

Roger thought almost angrily: I've flown all this way, I've taken these chances, they're here because I begged them to come, and they don't want me to be in at the kill. As the thoughts ran through his mind, he looked into Lukas's brown eyes, and saw Hombi, who was so like Jameson, also staring at him. There was no doubt that they were pleading

with him to agree, and not to take risks. They would not plead if they could compel him to stay behind.

Everything in his being urged him to reject the pleas, to go to the house with them. He could see their point of view and understand their anxiety; he felt a sense of gratitude, and satisfaction, too, that they should be so anxious and treat him with such solicitude, but - my God, did they think he was made of cotton-wool?

Suddenly, the decision was made for him.

There was a shot from the house; a shout; another shot, followed by a reverberating thud. The front door opened and Nightingale appeared, with Faith just behind him. Nightingale was holding her wrist, as if he were dragging her, but she was running as fast. He turned towards the side of the house, weaving this way and that, and as he did so two men appeared in the doorway – two small men. One of them had a gun poised, and fired twice: there was no way of telling whether either of the fugitives had been hit.

Hombi, Lukas, and the other two Europeans had snatched their revolvers out; there was a fierce rattle of bullets, the two small men seemed to crumple up. As they did so, Nightingale released Faith's hand and staggered forward, knees bending; he had been hit The girl ran on, skirt riding halfway up her legs, running blindly as if driven only by terror.

Roger bellowed: 'Faith! It's all right! Faith!'

But as he shouted there was a crackle of shooting from the other side of the house, someone must have tried to get away there, and one of the police patrols was in action. It strengthened terror and it added wings to the girl, who was still running blindly.

Roger was already moving towards her, calling as loudly as he could:

'Faith! It's all right. You're safe, safe!'

The word 'safe' seemed to echo about the rocks and the valleys, about the slag heap and the house itself. *S-A-A-A A-FE*. He thought she heard him. She glanced round. She must have seen some of the armed policemen, Bantus, and they frightened her. She ran straight on, wildly, all control gone. Roger saw which way she was heading, saw that if she wasn't

cut off she would fall over the edge of the ravine. He did not pause to reason that the Bantus would be more able than he to save her.

There was a short cut, where the ground was rough, but none of the Bantus was taking it; they were probably worried about the men inside the house. So Roger took it. He thought he heard his name called in a stentorian voice, heard two more shots – and then plunged into a patch of stony ground. Quite suddenly the earth seemed to open up beneath him. As he toppled downwards, he realized with awful certainty what he had done. Here was a jagged tear in the rock, a fissure which ran almost at right angles to the main crevice, and he was falling into it.

Beneath him there was nothing but small stones and jagged rocks and the bottom of the crevice hundreds of feet below. He actually thought: *Hundreds, thousands.* He hunched his body and tried to protect his head with his hands; he felt the pain of blow after blow, against his ribs, his legs, his thighs, his arms, his neck, his head, his hands, his feet. It was as if every part of his body was being assaulted by the rocks, as if they were striking at him viciously, sadistically.

He did not lose consciousness altogether.

He was aware of the pain, and of sounds which happened inside him, as if his bones were breaking He felt numbness as well as pain He felt heat. The pain seemed to be drawn from the rest of his body into his head, for his head ached as he had never known it, and was hot, hot, terribly hot, burning hot.

He felt sick, but it was not an intolerable nausea; even his stomach was going numb. But not his head. That was burning. Flaming. He could not move; he could do nothing to cool it.

It so happened that he had fallen where the sun still struck savagely, and where there was no shade.

# 25

# *EBB AND FLOW*

ROGER WAS aware of sounds.

They were vague sounds. He could not distinguish them. They were accompanied by shadowy movements. Now and again they were accompanied by sharp stabbing pains in his arm – always in his arm. He did not know what caused these. He became aware of a light touch on his forehead, and of something hard in his mouth – they were holding his mouth open, the fools. He did not realize that when he first thought 'the fools', it was the beginning of real consciousness. After that, he knew more about what was going on, although no one spoke to him. It was as if his own mind was slightly below the surface, aware of what was happening but indifferent and uninterested.

Before long, the shapes became less shadowy, and he knew what was happening. He was in hospital. They were doctors and nurses. They were taking his temperature. They were cooling his forehead. They were giving him injections. After every injection he slept for a while, and when he came round from one of them he saw a face. He had seen it before. It was a black face. He thought of Lieutenant Jameson, in London – it was his face. Or was it that sergeant's, whom he had met out on the rocks. Whoever it was smiled, and it was a warming and reassuring smile. A gentle voice said:

'You will soon be well.'

Of course he would ... wouldn't he?

He had a sense that life as well as consciousness was ebbing and flowing. Gradually, the times when it flowed seemed to be longer and the flood-tide stronger. He began to remember things. Suddenly he became anxious for Faith Soames, and soon after he came round again he was even more anxious. And he did not even know what had

happened at Van der Lunn's place. Why didn't someone come and tell him?

His anxiety, his curiosity, and his interest ebbed; again nothing mattered. He dozed, and woke, and on waking his mind seemed to be much more its usual self, he saw everything clearly, and when he had lain on his back staring at the venetian blinds at the window, he looked round for a bell. His right arm was stiff, but he could move it. He knew there was something holding his waist and his left leg firmly, but he did not think much about that He found a bell-push, and pressed, and very soon footsteps sounded, and the door opened and a middle-aged nurse came in, anxious at first, but then beaming all over her pleasant face.

'You're awake!' she cried. 'You'll be all right now.' She spoke as if to reassure herself as much as to reassure him. 'I will fetch the doctor. Don't move, just wait.' She went out bustling, and Roger lay and looked at tiny slats of light which crept through the blinds, and made him remember the fierce heat of the sun.

Two men, white-smocked, came in ...

. . . .

He had been in the main hospital in Johannesburg for five days, he learned at intervals. He had nothing to worry about now, but for a day or two the doctors had been anxious about him. They said so very clearly, so that he should not be tempted to try to overdo it, and so have a relapse. He had fractured his left leg below the knee, a clean break quickly mended, and had cracked some ribs and dislocated his left shoulder, hence all the strapping and the plaster round his leg. His chief danger had been from the effect of the sun; heatstroke. It was unusual for a man to be affected so quickly; had he been run down, or working at too high a pressure? In the quietness of his own mind Roger knew that he had been working at too high a pressure, and so he had been more vulnerable than he should have been.

What about Nightingale? And the girl? And ...

Some time afterwards, Captain Standish appeared at the bedside, instead of the doctors. He looked as sardonic and as

cynical as ever, but the grip of his hand on Roger's uninjured right hand gave the lie to much of that.

'Just like the Yard,' he said. 'You couldn't leave it to anyone else. Did anyone take the trouble to tell you that the young woman saw you fall? That made her stop, or she would have gone down herself.'

'It's a charitable thought,' said Roger. 'Really?'

'Cross my heart.' Standish almost leered. 'Nightingale was shot in the back, but the bullet is out and he'll be all right, which a lot of people think is more than he deserves.'

'Do I deserve to be told whether he's made a statement?' asked Roger.

'Yes, he has, and so has the young woman,' Standish said. 'Nightingale was sure that the Bradshaws were involved. He believed that Faith Soames had been kidnapped, so that the kidnappers could blackmail him and prevent him from telling the police what he knew of the Bradshaws — and he went to save her. He was not so reckless as you might think, though. He had sent a coded cable to old Soames's private address, giving all the details of his case against the Bradshaws — both the brothers, not one. He went to the mine prepared to say that if the girl was freed Soames would not publish the story — he was sure that Soames would back him up. That's why he felt that he could safely tackle the people at the mine. We now know that David Bradshaw had bribed porters at most airports. There was one at the Jan Smuts, a man who also worked for the brother, and put the diamonds into Nightingale's luggage. Now, what's next? Ah, yes. Faith Soames had a telephone call from a man who said that he was *The Globe*'s reporter in Johannesburg, so she went to meet him. I suppose she can't be blamed for that. She arranged to meet the car in Kempton Park, but drove past it to see who was at the wheel, and realized that it wasn't *The Globe* man at all. So she tried to get away, but they shot at her car and punctured a tyre. She reached the telephone kiosk and made that call to you, after distracting them by driving the car up a side street. They chased after it. She slipped back to the telephone, but they caught up with her too soon. When Nightingale heard that she was a

prisoner he went to try to do a deal at Van der Lunn's place. He told them that the story about Van der Lunn was already in London, but they didn't seem to care.' Standish's lip twisted. 'Guess why.'

Roger said quietly: 'Because Van der Lunn wasn't involved.'

'You never were convinced of that, were you?'

'No,' said Roger. 'I was mistaken about the Bradshaws, but not about Van der Lunn. The thefts and the smuggling seemed big, but not big enough for a man of his reputation to risk losing it, or for a patriotic South African to cheat his Government.'

'I know how you get results,' said Standish. 'You make a wild guess and then justify it by logic. Feel like guessing what was really going on?'

Roger said: 'You tell me.'

'Like to sleep on it, and guess tomorrow?'

'I'll sleep on it when you've told me what it was,' said Roger. When Standish didn't respond, he went on: 'If you must play your little game, it's now obvious that both the Bradshaws were involved, and that when we arrested David Bradshaw, either the accomplices or Joshua Bradshaw believed he would tell us the whole truth, so they killed him.'

'Cain and Abel?'

'Was it?'

'Yes,' said Standish. 'He had more reason than you might think, though. David's wife didn't know that Joshua was involved, but she believed her husband was under pressure. She meant to make him talk — the one thing Joshua feared. But Joshua swears he didn't order the killing in the police station — the Italians planned that themselves, convinced that David *would* give them away.' Standish pushed his chair back and stood up, as if he did not intend to tell Roger any more yet, but all he did was to call out: 'Come in, Lieutenant.' The door opened and Jameson came in, smiling and obviously contented; so it was his, not Hombi's face Roger had seen in his half-conscious state. Jameson came across, shook hands, and stood back from the bed. Standish remained on his feet, too.

'I am very glad you are not worse,' said Jameson, as if that mattered more than anything else. 'And I congratulate you, Superintendent. I have been told that but for your bravery much more harm might have been done. However, I am here to report what happened in England. First I bring you a message from your wife, whom I saw two days ago. Her love. Next, I bring you the regards of the Assistant Commissioner' – he paused – 'Chief Inspectors Klemm and McKay, and Detective-Sergeant Gorlay. All of them are very gratified by the result. The others who worked with the team also send their best wishes, Superintendent.'

'This team work,' interpolated Standish.

'That was the strongest impression made on me by Scotland Yard – the close integration of all the departments and all the ranks,' said Jameson. 'Since the arrest of Joshua Bradshaw, who was not hurt but was caught when hiding from the police, Rebecca Bradshaw and Elizabeth Bradshaw have made full statements. They did not know what was afoot, but were afraid it was criminal, and tried to stop their husbands going on with it. They were going to leave the hotel very soon. Each woman trusted and loved her husband, there's no doubt about that.'

'And Joshua?'

'Joshua has confessed to everything except a part in his brother's murder. The Bradshaw's worked with the two Italians who spent much time at the Seven Seas Club in Soho. That was the place of contact, an unofficial headquarters. Common View Hotel was kept simply as a cover. All arrangements were made by telephone and by word of mouth. The story which David Bradshaw told us was untrue, of course – he and his brother were the organizers of the smuggling – and they used the Italians to go to the industrial users and steal the diamonds back. Apart from porters at each airport, men who once persuaded to commit a crime could thereafter be blackmailed into doing whatever they were told, no one else was involved.' Jameson glanced at Standish. 'Have you informed Mr West of the Van der Lunn aspect of the situation, Captain?'

'No,' said Standish promptly. 'I was hoping he would

guess. I think it would be good for his ego. Going to have a shot, Handsome?'

It was the first time he had used the nickname.

Roger said almost musingly. 'Van der Lunn wasn't guilty, but suddenly he became a danger to them. So, he must have found out what was going on. However, he couldn't have found out until he was on the aircraft or he would have telephoned the police. He must have seen something at the Jan Smuts, and faced David Bradshaw with it. Bradshaw took immediate action, putting drugs in his drinks – morphine kept on the plane for emergencies in flight. How am I doing?'

Standish said: 'Too well!'

'There is more,' Jameson said.

'There must be much more,' Roger agreed 'Well, let's see.' He was beginning to feel tired, and rather edgy. It would be interesting to find out how far he could interpret the events in the light of what information he now had. He leaned back on his pillows, closing his eyes, letting thoughts and the new facts drift through his mind rather than making any effort at logical thought; this was the way he worked whenever there was a case without an obvious solution. At last he went on: 'So Van der Lunn found out and had to be silenced, but David Bradshaw didn't want him dead. David was not prepared to commit murder. Actually, he *saved* Van der Lunn's life at the hotel, and the Italians knew this - another reason for the daring murder. They had needed his mine, and all the facilities which only a mine could offer.'

Jameson was beaming, Standish smiling wryly.

'Just a little more,' Jameson urged. 'You are so very near. May I give him a hint, Captain?'

'A very little one.'

'A little hint,' Jameson said. 'Yes.' He paused, and then added: 'Traffic moves in two directions, Superintendent.'

Standish chuckled.

'That's good,' he said. 'And that's all. How about it, Handsome?'

# 26

## *TRAFFIC FLOWS TWO WAYS*

After a long pause, Roger said: 'No, I don't get it.' He was much more tired than he had expected, and his eagerness to know the final truth was less sharp than it had been; he wanted to know, but he was half-prepared to wait until morning. 'Traffic moves two ways,' he said aloud. 'No. You'll have to tell me.'

As he spoke the door opened and two nurses came in, one of them indignant, the other apologetic. The Superintendent had already been talking too long, and in any case, the doctor was on his way to see him. Standish stood up, Jameson seemed to hesitate and then Standish said:

'Will you sleep on it?'

'I think I'd better.'

He thought about it a great deal. A two-way traffic. There must be a simple answer, and yet it didn't come to him. It teased but did not worry him. In any case, it could not stop him from sleeping, for they gave him an injection and he was wafted off within ten minutes. Before he slept he thought of the 'two way traffic' and half consciously about the message from Janet. It would be good to see her, to get back.

In the morning, he felt much better than he had done since coming round. He felt hungrier, and believed that he could walk if it weren't for the plaster about his leg. He was impatient for Standish and Jameson to come again, too, and when they didn't arrive by eleven o'clock, he began to feel annoyed. That did not last long. He sensed from the way the nurses fussed that there was a special visitor about to come, probably the specialist who had been consulted. Instead, Colonel Wicss came in by himself. This was really the top treatment.

Wiess saluted, shook hands, smiled down, pulled up a chair, and said:

'Two-way traffic, Superintendent?'

'I haven't got the answer,' Roger said.

'It would have been only a matter of time,' Wiess said. 'And it is very simple. We were searching for a method of smuggling diamonds into foreign countries after they had left South Africa, but passengers were seldom found with diamonds in their baggage. We were looking at the wrong end. The diamonds were being smuggled out, sold, stolen, and—'

'Smuggled back into South Africa!' Roger cried.

'Ach, yes, that is so. They were then put into stock at the Van der Lunn's mine, and eventually sold to de Beers and the Syndicate, who believed that they had been newly mined here in South Africa. The two Italians and Joshua Bradshaw went to the mine to steal a large stock of diamonds they knew were there. The fraud was connived at by Mr Van der Lunn's managers. We have confronted his managers with this, and they have admitted it. We know what happened to him when he reached London – in fact, what happened from the time he boarded the aircraft.' Wiess paused, and then added in a gruff voice: 'There is no need to involve him.'

Roger said slowly. 'So it all works out.'

'Yes,' said Wiess. 'It has worked out so quickly because you came to South Africa. I know that I speak for many people as well as myself when I say that I am very grateful indeed.'

Roger asked, quietly: 'Even Nightingale and Miss Soames?'

For the first time in Roger's knowledge of him, Wiess actually threw back his head and laughed.

'Only this morning copies of The Globe reached us by air-mail,' he said. 'I have one for you.' He opened his briefcase and handed Roger the *Daily Globe*, folded so that the front page was hidden. He opened it, and saw the banner headlines:

SA TRIUMPH FOR 'HANDSOME' WEST

There was his photograph, and Faith's, and Nightingale's. There was a story, told forthrightly and clearly, giving nothing away that was best kept secret and yet telling everything that mattered. Roger was so intent on it that although he saw Wiess move he did not realize that the Colonel had gone to the door. He was just aware that the door had opened, thought vaguely that Wiess must be allowing him to enjoy his triumph in peace, saw an arrow pointing from a sentence in italics: *West's Wife and Family – p. 7.* He turned to page seven, and Janet and the boys were there, smiling as if straight at him. Janet was looking her best, the boys apparently as happy as could be.

Someone was standing by the bedside. It wasn't Wiess, it was a woman. He looked up. He gaped. He gasped. He could not believe it, but there she was: Janet, his wife, standing and looking down on him, smiling a little tremulously but smiling. More: she was looking quite at her best, better even than in the photograph.

Suddenly she was leaning over him, and kissing him, and crying a little. Tears did not last for long, and she drew back and sat on the side of the bed. She kept a hand on his arm, lightly, and looked at him as if hungrily.

'We're all so proud of you, darling. So very proud.' She gave an excited little laugh. 'All of us. Soames of *The Globe* telephoned me and said enough to make you blush. And his niece – isn't she charming? – came and saw me as soon as she got back to London. She said she never expected to meet a more remarkable man. She thinks so much of you, Roger, darling. I was so afraid before you went away; I thought you'd got tired of me. I thought you'd fallen in love with another woman. And Faith Soames said that all you seemed to talk about, when she met you here, was me.'

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